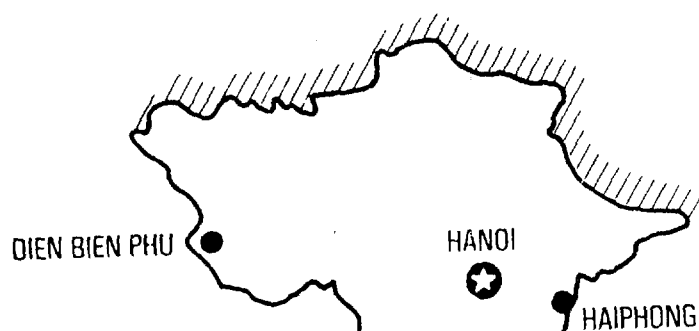


AD A 096423



*A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned  
in Vietnam*

# OMNIBUS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

AWCI


9 March 1981

SUBJECT: Declassification of the BDM Study, "The Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam"

Defense Technical Information Center  
ATTN: Ms. Betty Weatherholtz  
Cameron Station  
Alexandria, VA 22314

1. Your organization was on the distribution list for the BDM study, "The Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam." The study was assigned AD numbers B048632L through 641L.
2. In December 1980, the Army War College Security Office notified all recipients of the study by telephone that it contained classified information and should be secured.
3. BDM now has revised the appropriate pages of the study to delete all classified information and has conformed to all other requirements required by the clearance review.
4. A revised copy of the study which is unclassified and approved for public release is inclosed. DTIC Form 50's are inclosed for assignment of new AD numbers.

Incls  
as

  
ANDREW C. REMSON, JR.  
Colonel, CE  
Director, Strategic Studies Institute



7915 Jones Branch Drive  
McLean, Virginia 22102  
Phone (703) 821-5000

April 28, 1980

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A STUDY OF STRATEGIC LESSONS  
LEARNED IN VIETNAM •  
OMNIBUS  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY •

This Executive Summary is submitted to DAMG-SSP.  
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## FOREWORD

This Omnibus Executive Summary is submitted to DAMO-SSP in accordance with the provisions of Contract No. DAAG 39-78-C-0120. The eight volumes of this study respond to the specific tasks (volumes) and subtasks (chapters) set forth in the description and specifications established by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans (ODCSOPS), Department of the Army. This Omnibus Executive Summary presents in one document the principal insights and lessons reflected separately in the eight volumes of this study.

Volume I	The Enemy
Volume II	South Vietnam
Volume III	US Foreign Policy and Vietnam 1945-1975
Volume IV	US Domestic Factors Influencing Vietnam War Policy Making
Volume V	Planning the War
Volume VI	Conduct of the War
Volume VII	The Soldier
Volume VIII	Results of the War

Omnibus Executive Summary
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Appropriation For	
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TAB	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unrecovered	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Nothing on file</i>	
Distribution/	
Availability Codes	
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As used in this study, INSIGHTS are based on the data and analysis of each specific subject. They are historical in nature and are intended to be incisive summary observations concerning the key factors which

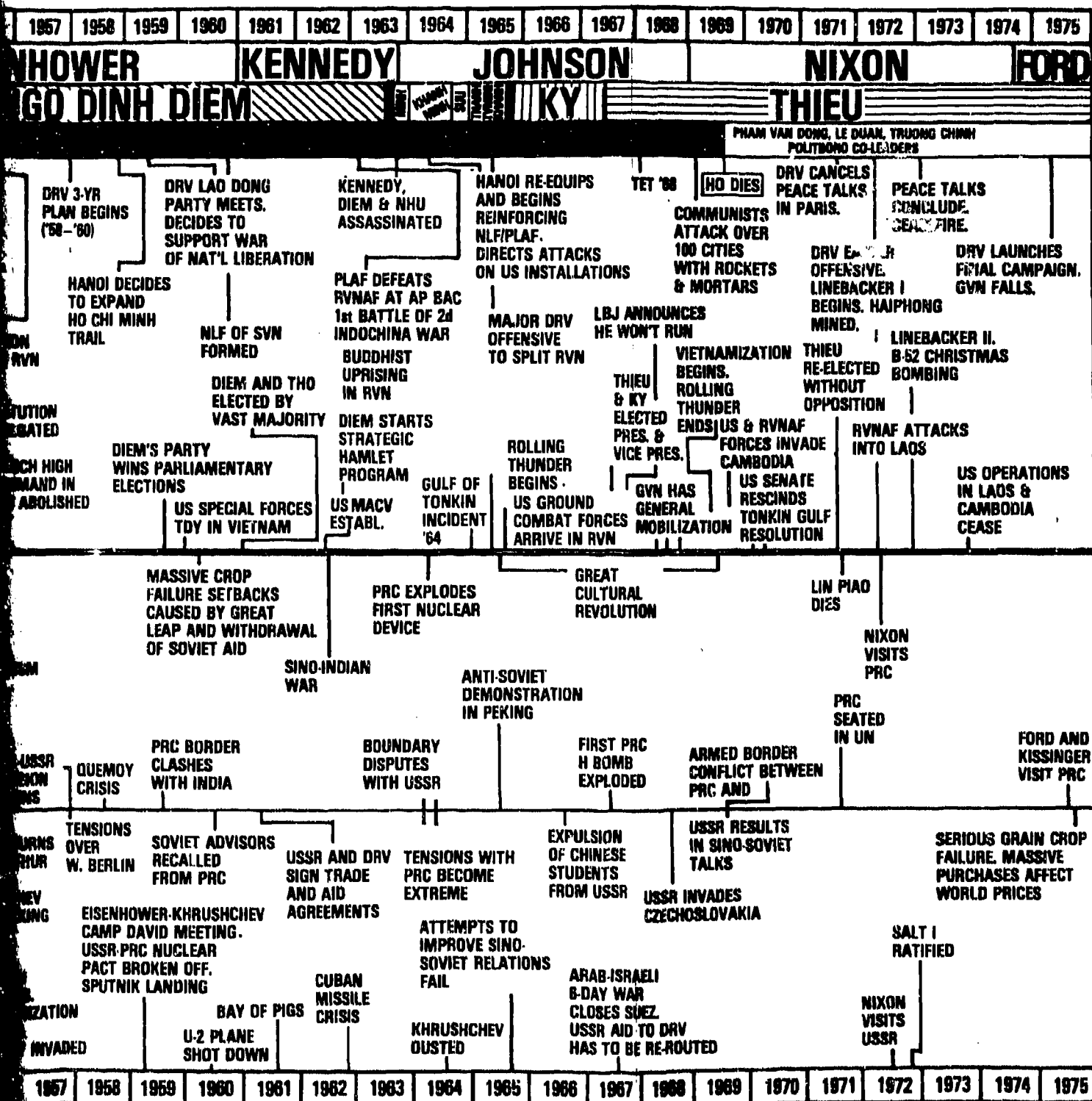


influenced, for better or worse, significant outcomes. The primary focus is on military perspectives. LESSONS are more general or universal in nature and are based on one or more insights on the subject. They tend to be forward-looking and not directly related to the Vietnam experience.

Figure EX-1 shows a chronology of selected events that relate to the conduct of the war in Indochina. Where appropriate, maps or figures are included with the material that introduces the insights and lessons for each each of the eight volumes. For source material refer to the endnotes to each chapter or to the bibliography found at the end of each volume.

"The views of the authors do not purport to reflect the positions of the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense."

YEAR	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
US PRESIDENTS	TRUMAN								EISENHOWER						
SVN LEADERS	BAO DAI								NGO DINH DIEM						
NVN LEADERS	HO CHI MINH														
SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM	<div>JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF INDOCHINA TERMINATED</div> <div>FRENCH REOCCUPY VIETNAM</div> <div>US BEGINS AID THROUGH FRENCH</div> <div>VN ARMED FORCES FORMALLY CREATED</div> <div>FRANCE RECOGNIZES VIETNAM AS AN ASSOCIATED STATE</div> <div>DIEN BIEN PHU FALLS</div> <div>GENEVA CONFERENCE ON VIETNAM</div> <div>USG DECIDES NOT TO HELP FRENCH AT DIEN BIEN PHU</div> <div>VN ASSUMES LEADERSHIP OF RVNAF</div> <div>SEATO TREATY SIGNED IN MANILA</div> <div>DRV CALLS FOR PREPARATIONS FOR 1960 ELECTIONS TO UNITE VIETNAM</div> <div>DRV 3-YR PLAN BEGINS ('58-'60)</div> <div>HANOI DECIDES TO EXPAND HO CHI MINH TRAIL</div> <div>VP NIXON VISITS RVN</div> <div>RVN CONSTITUTION PROMULGATED</div> <div>FRENCH HIGH COMMAND IN RVN ABOLISHED</div> <div>DIEM'S PARTY WINS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS</div>														
SIGNIFICANT SOCIO-POLIT. EVENTS IN AND AFFECTING THE PRC	<div>US CONTINUES SUPPORT OF CHIANG KAI-SHEK</div> <div>MAO TSE TUNG DEFEATS CHIANG WHO FLEES TO TAIWAN. PRC ESTABLISHED.</div> <div>PRC ENTERS KOREAN WAR</div> <div>FIRST 5-YEAR PLAN APPROVED. SOVIET SUPPORT PROVIDED.</div> <div>KOREAN CEASEFIRE</div> <div>BANDUNG CONFERENCE. CHINA SEEKS BROADER ANTI-IMPERIALISM POLICY</div> <div>MASS FAILURE CAUSE LEAP OF SO</div> <div>NATIONALISTS AND COMMUNISTS FAIL TO AGREE ON COALITION GOV'T. SECOND CIVIL WAR BEGINS</div> <div>PRC RECOGNIZES THE DRV</div> <div>PRC-USSR TENSION BEGINS</div> <div>QUEMOY CRISIS</div> <div>PRC CLAIM WITH</div>														
SIGNIFICANT SOCIO-POLIT. EVENTS IN AND AFFECTING THE USSR	<div>TREATY WITH CHIANG'S NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT</div> <div>COLD WAR ERA BEGINS</div> <div>FALL OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA. BERLIN AIRLIFT.</div> <div>USSR RECOGNIZES THE DRV</div> <div>TREATY WITH PRC FOR MUTUAL ASSISTANCE</div> <div>19th PARTY CONGRESS. "CAPITALIST ENCIRCLEMENT" DOCTRINE DRAWN UP</div> <div>USSR VETOS THAILAND'S REQUEST IN UN TO INVESTIGATE SITUATION IN LAOS</div> <div>USSR RETURNS PORT ARTHUR TO MAO. KHRUSHCHEV VISITS PEKING</div> <div>TENSIONS OVER W. BERLIN</div> <div>SOVIET RECALL FROM</div> <div>YALTA CONFERENCE. STALIN GAINS TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS IN PACIFIC FOR PROMISE TO ENTER WAR AGAINST JAPAN</div> <div>STALIN DIES. KHRUSHCHEV CONSOLIDATES POWER IN 1956. BEGINNING OF "DESTALININIZATION." SOVIET TROOPS ENTER E. GERMANY</div> <div>20th CPSU CONGRESS. DE-STALINIZATION UNVEILED. HUNGARY INVADED</div> <div>EISENHOWER-DIEM CAMP DAVID MEETING. USSR-PRC NUCLEAR PACT BROKEN. SPUTNIK LAUNCHED</div>														
YEAR	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

→ Basically, as far as Vietnam is concerned, we won practically all the battles but, by any sensible definition of strategic objectives, we lost the war. This is a new experience--harrowing, sorrowful, but true. Thus it's absolutely imperative that we study how it is that you can win so frequently, and so well, in a war-fighting sense, and yet lose a war in a strategic or political sense. It's unique; and it's not something that we want to duplicate!

Maj. Gen. DeWitt Smith  
July 1977

A. MAJOR THEMES

→ Any study of such magnitude, complexity and sensitivity as is this one would be quite difficult to summarize without perpetrations of both omission and commission. Therefore, this omnibus portion of the executive summary focuses on several of the most significant themes emerging from the study which are likely to concern today's and tomorrow's leaders and strategists. The executive summaries for the eight volumes of the study are included, with minor editing. → must page

During the conduct of the extensive research and analyses for this pioneer work, the study team became increasingly impressed with the extreme pressures and constraints influencing the key decision makers, both civilian and military; those pressures were considered, to the extent possible, when making judgments concerning the various leaders' perceptions, decisions, and overall manner of execution. In his memoirs, Henry Kissinger somewhat ruefully remarked that historians seldom take full note of the pressures on decision makers during crises, and by then he had viewed the tunnel from both ends. Yet with the mixed blessing of at least partial hindsight, criticisms -- as objective as possible -- have to be made of certain agencies, practices, and less so of individuals; otherwise no valid and useful lessons can be drawn.


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In the penultimate paragraph of his memoirs Gen. Westmoreland wrote:

Among some of my military colleagues I nevertheless sense a lingering concern that the military served as the scapegoat of the war in Vietnam. I fail to share that concern. The military quite clearly did the job that the nation asked and expected of it, and I am convinced that history will reflect more favorably upon the performance of the military than upon that of the politicians and policy makers. The American people can be particularly proud that their military leaders scrupulously adhered to a basic tenet of our Constitution prescribing civilian control of the military.

Perhaps history will bear out that prediction, but ~~so~~<sup>ever</sup> so the military would not be justified in resting on its hard-won laurels. The judgment of the study team is that the cardinal blame for our ultimate failure can not be placed on any single individual or institution; there is sufficient credit and blame to share. ~~As their title indicates,~~<sup>The</sup> authors ~~Gale and Bett~~<sup>Gale and Bett</sup> concluded that "The System Worked"; perhaps so, but it certainly did not work very quickly, painlessly, or efficiently and in the end, we lost.

Another principal by-product of the study effort was the building of sincere respect and admiration for the soldiers (in the generic sense) of all major participants in the conflict. It was recognized that there were incompetents and opportunists in all units, but they were totally overshadowed by uncounted acts of valor and self-sacrifice which became the norm. The American soldier, in particular, had very little to gain and so much to lose, especially towards the end. Very few of them had any influence on why they were there, what they were asked to do, or even if they were to live or die. ~~With rare exceptions, such as My Lai, in no way was the confusion, frustration, and hatred of that war their fault.~~ To those soldiers, BDM respectfully dedicates this study. The veterans of that war deserve -- and earned -- far more than they received and are still receiving since their return.





B. ON WINNING BATTLES AND LOSING WARS

It could be argued that the US did not lose the war, but rather that it was lost by the South Vietnamese, or even that the North Vietnamese won it. Although there is some validity in each of those viewpoints, they tend to cloud the main issue facing the United States: why could not our overwhelming military power be translated into equivalent political and diplomatic advantages in Indochina?

Modern wars tend to be fought to gain political or economic objectives. (In the past some wars have been initiated primarily to save the pride of an autocratic ruler.) Battles and campaigns are among the means employed to gain the desired end. Unnecessary and costly battles, even though "won" in the traditional military sense, often amount to "defeats" in a larger sense. Conversely, a series of military defeats, even near disasters, can advance a determined and clever opponent yet closer to his ultimate aim.

A primary ingredient in the alchemy of war is the relative value which the opponents place on their respective aims, and thus the price each is willing to pay to achieve his ultimate object. In large measure this fact explains why the US was able to win both its Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 even while losing most of the major battles. The situation in Vietnam was somewhat similar, but with the roles reversed. Appendix A displays some of the major asymmetries which impacted on the determination and capability of the opponents to persevere until their objectives were achieved. The US was fighting a distant, limited war, on the periphery of our "vital interests" and for a cause initially thought to be clear, but which became increasingly clouded and questioned over time. The enemy fought a total war, at home, for aims absolutely central to his ideology, political system, and regional ambitions. The US goal was essentially negative and thus defensive while that of the Dang Lao Dong, or Communist Worker's Party, was a positive and offensive one; thus, for the most part, the political, psychological and military initiative lay with the enemy. Additionally, their skillful use of the "reverse speak" technique defined

the "moral battlefield" to their advantage and placed the US and GVN on the political and psychological defensive.

Mao Tse-tung wrote that "power grows out of the barrel of a gun, and the party always controls the gun." However else the Communist Vietnamese leaders diverged from Mao's theory and practices they certainly had no quarrel with this maxim. The US has a similar tradition in that the US Constitution explicitly provides for civilian control of the military. In practice, however, there was a serious disconnect and mismatch between end and means; the fault lay on both sides of the Potomac and of the Pacific. The historical isolation of the US military from political matters (even nonpartisan ones) made the interface and interchange between the leaders in mufti and uniform difficult and strained in an extremely political conflict. The air war, for example, was largely controlled by the White House, through CINCPAC, and it was an amalgam of "gradualism," "thresholds of pain," and "signals," all of which proved to be counterproductive. On the other hand, the ground strategy, under the aegis of COMUSMACV until after Tet '68, became increasingly costly and controversial. In effect, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense "rubber stamped" the annual combined campaign plans emanating from MACV until 1969, when the new Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, began to take charge through the Vietnamization program.

In large part the civilian military differences were due to the varied backgrounds, mandates, perspectives, and professional biases of the principals. With exceptions, there were significant differences between civilian and military leaders, between US government agencies, and even between military services and subservices. But the most intractable disconnect was between the open, straightforward logic of the US leadership and the more subtle, "devious," and sophisticated thinking of the enemies; a lesser but harmful communications gap also existed between the US government and its allies.

For example, a main problem in understanding, or even following the war in Vietnam has always been that the

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two sides operate from a different scale of values and norms relating to success or failure, victory or defeat.<sup>1/</sup>

Both sides naturally put forth the best face on ties and defeats for purposes of propaganda, for reason of morale, and also for more human and less noble reasons. Yet, in many controversial battles and campaigns both opponents rightly could claim, "victories," each according to his own perspective. In the traditional manner the US based its claims on comparative casualties (body count) and of ground held or taken, even if only temporarily. The enemy, with a broader and longer-range view, focused more on political and psychological gains and losses, shifts in the overall momentum, and balance of forces - both regional and global. Thus their claims of victories at Tet '68, Khe Sanh '68, and even Easter '72 were not groundless. Which side held the initiative and reaped the long-range benefits from those fights? Another case in point: despite the belated but successful Israeli counteroffensive in the October 1973 war, the fact that the Egyptians crossed the Suez and held their bridgeheads upset the regional status quo. Whose victory?

Unless one side surrenders or "fades away," wars end with some sort of negotiated settlement. Before such agreements are concluded there is a more or less protracted period of "fight-talk." During that twilight stage, a tough totalitarian regime has a number of inherent advantages denied to a Western liberal democracy. This fact was painfully demonstrated to the US during the latter years of the Korean and Indochinese conflicts. Giap and others have said, in effect, that: "One can not win at the negotiating table what one has not won on the battlefield." But is this really true? Take, for example, the Paris Accords of January 1973. The US agreed to a total bombing halt and withdrawal of its military power (with slight chance of reinsertion) and an extremely disadvantageous in-place cease fire in exchange for some deliberately ambiguous and difficult to enforce protocols designed to maintain the precarious balance of

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1. Michael Elliott-Bateman, et al., Revolt to Revolution (Manchester University Press, 1970), p. 284. Douglas Pike and other students of Vietnamese Communism have made the same point in a variety of ways).

power between the RVN and the DRV. At the time of the signing, the latter's armies had been soundly beaten and their "great rear base" was totally vulnerable to US airpower. At least superficially it appears that they won far more in Paris than they had in Vietnam. A deeper look, however, raises fundamental questions about such a judgment. President Nixon and National Security Advisor Kissinger had used their last trumps (Linebackers I & II) to gain what was possibly the maximum available under the prevailing circumstances; the return of the POW's, a fragile cease-fire, and a "decent interval" for both the US and the RVN. By then the US polity and their Congress had "voted" against "fight," for "talk" alone. The seemingly endless and pointless treasure lost and blood spilled in countless battles, won and lost over the years, finally had taken their cumulative toll; another casualty of attrition.

One final point should be made on this issue for the sake of historical accuracy and for future analysis. The US lost more battles, both large and small, in Vietnam than it admitted or possibly even comprehended at the time. This anomaly existed because of a lack of an in-depth understanding of the complex nature of that political-military conflict. First, one must define the term "battle" in that context. Were the following incidents really battles? The bombing of the US Embassy or a crowded movie theater? The sinking of the large helicopter carrier, USNS Card, at a Saigon dock? The extremely costly -- to us -- rocket, mortar, and sniper attacks on US air bases, BQ's, and ammunition dumps? The thousands of lives, limbs, and vehicles lost to mines and boobytraps with not one enemy in sight? In most cases those were carefully planned and skillfully conducted military operations based on the enemy's concept of People's War in which everyone is a "soldier." In sum, those sorts of "battles" added up to one-sided attrition in both the physical and psychological spheres. Appendix B portrays a representative sample of some of the more controversial "battles" which, by various definitions,<sup>2/</sup> were regarded both as victories and defeats.

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2. The definitions vary based on the participation and stakes in and knowledge of a given battle; thus, individual soldiers, their commanders, the press, the public, politicians, historians, and the enemy all maintained different perspectives.

This study does not pretend it has resolved this important issue; however, it has possibly and hopefully opened a once locked door. Neither national nor military pride should preclude objective, detailed analyses of those and other battles in order to determine what really went well or poorly and why. An intriguing sub-issue: why could one side (ours) not "afford" to lose -- or even appear to lose -- any major battle and thus often had to "reinforce failure," while the other side could and did lose many while calling them victories?

C. THE AMERICAN "WAY OF WAR" TESTED

The American "Way of War" is a natural by-product of the interaction of our history, wealth, industrial and scientific strength, way of life, military experiences, and of our national character or psyche. Its basic philosophy is to substitute massive amounts of monies and materiel to save US lives (i.e., to help the enemy to die for his country). In many respects this philosophy makes eminent sense for the richest and most hardware-oriented society in the world, one in which the individual has become increasingly potent and protected emotionally and politically. Despite theorists and idealists who deplore the vast expenditures and inevitable destruction inherent in our way of fighting, any US commander who would substitute his men's skill and bravery (and thus lives) for firepower would not last long; nor would he be admired or mourned in or out of the military. (Some of the major characteristics of this "Way of War" are described in Appendix C.)

As both individual rights and materiel resources expanded so did the nearly inexorable trend towards attrition as the primary basis for both strategy and tactics. The political-geographic constraints placed on the American ground war in Vietnam played a major (some argue absolute) role in the selection of a strategy of attrition. Even with looser reins, however, it is not unlikely that attrition would have retained its central position. From the Civil War on, and despite the often severe peacetime droughts, the US military had become masters of massive logistics and the envy of most

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modern armed forces. Military leaders are not all that dissimilar in certain traits from bureaucrats, business men, and football coaches who tend to rely on what they already know and what has worked in the past. Just like Woody Hayes' teams, which were able to grind down most opponents but were occasionally "outplayed, outscored and outcoached" by more agile teams coached by subtle tacticians, the US Army tried to grind down its opponent in Vietnam through attrition but was in effect "out played" and "outscored" by a smaller more agile adversary.<sup>3/</sup>

There were fundamental problems with the American "Way of War" as it was applied in Indochina. Although it was generally quite efficient (if not always effective), awesome and usually overpowering, it was also extremely expensive and getting more so daily. Furthermore, despite its marvelous mechanical mobility, it was ponderous once afoot because of the huge logistics tail and the inbred life style. It also was handicapped in the diplomatic, political and psychological arenas since it inevitably invoked, at home and abroad, the mental (and TV) picture of a huge Goliath unfairly bullying a small but heroic David.

Maxwell Taylor, S.L.A. Marshall, and many other respected and knowledgeable military leaders, have claimed the United States started the "big war" (1965) with the finest military machine of any we have sent overseas to fight in this century. Yet despite its initial excellence, the US military machine did not achieve the goals expected of it, and, in the end, experienced many difficulties. Nearly two and a half times the total tonnage of bombs dropped by the US in World War II and Korea were employed in Indochina -- at a lesser cost in civilian casualties. Yet the enemy was neither "killed" nor even permanently disabled. Moreover, he never cried, "Stop! Enough!" Admittedly he had out-of-bounds hideaways in which to rest, recuperate and plan new strategies, and when pressed too hard could agree to protracted discussions. Moreover, the restrictions imposed on

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3. That army did not disintegrate, as some have charged, but it was a pale and much weakened copy when it withdrew seven years later; it was close to losing its pride, heart and soul and therefore combat effectiveness.

out-of-country operations by the US leadership made it inordinately difficult to locate and direct effective air and ground operations against the enemy.

In sum, massive US military power was not the best or only weapon for the Vietnam conflict, at least as it was employed. The question is, can US combat forces be trained and mentally conditioned for the kind of people's war that was waged in Indochina? Realistically some personnel and some units can be so trained, but most cannot be reoriented without sacrificing inherent strengths and confidence. If true, that leaves the question of how best to select, train and employ those capable of readjusting physically, mentally, and psychologically; also how better to prepare and employ the majority? And for what sort of contest(s)?

D. FOR THE FUTURE

The overriding lesson learned from Vietnam at first appeared to be an emotional, though ambiguous, desire to ensure there would be "no more Vietnams." The practical result was that, until quite recently, the US government rigorously avoided even the appearance of military intervention overseas. Some sort of breathing space from the war years was necessary, at least temporarily, since the war in Vietnam demonstrated the US had overextended itself physically and emotionally. Additionally, the 1948 concept of containment had been penetrated and outflanked in several areas. Forces and support for a so called "2½ war strategy" were never close to being adequate; probably even the current "1½ war strategy" is overly ambitious and optimistic. Priority has been placed on restoring the diminished cohesion, vitality, and conventional strength of NATO.

The US military responded with enthusiasm to the priority of modernizing and otherwise refurbishing its forces for deterrence or fighting in Central Europe, while demurring, in mixed ways, on the Korean drawdown. The October 1973 war in the Middle East was singled out as the sign post pointing towards the future; thus, doctrine, forces, equipment and tactics focused on extrapolating experience applicable to the European arena.

(Within the past several years the "Lessons" of the Yom Kippur, or Ramadan, war have been subject to deeper and more skeptical review). Counter-insurgency was, and still is, seldom mentioned and study of any low intensity or unconventional war was relegated to the environs of limbo. National planners realized that funds would not be made available for anything which remotely resembled preparation for anything like another Vietnam. Cubans in Africa and the Mid East, Russians in Cuba and Afghanistan, and the humiliation in Teheran have regenerated popular and political support for a more flexible armed force; e.g., the Joint Rapid Deployment Force (RDF). As demonstrated by the US Army's commissioning of this study, deriving lessons from the extremely traumatic experience in Vietnam is regaining respectability -- at least in some quarters.

Traditionally, military forces have been accused of preparing for the last war, and more often than not the charge was true. In addition, a number of distinguished scholars and other "strategists" have declared that Vietnam was so unique that any lessons derived would be either useless or dangerous. Although there is some validity in this double caveat, one will never really know until an objective, in-depth analysis is conducted; hence, the potential value of this beginning step. At least theoretically, one should learn more from defeat than from victory as, in the latter case, even grievous errors are easily overlooked, rationalized or soon forgotten; a case in point was the radically different lessons drawn and remedies developed by the Germans and the French between the World Wars. Most of the lessons derived in this study are actually old lessons forgotten or at least sadly neglected. An example: "Know your enemy, your ally, and yourself." That maxim is so elementary and self-evident that one is hesitant to cite it as a major lesson of Vietnam. Yet a number of knowledgeable and reflective thinkers, such as Maxwell Taylor, have cited its neglect as a major factor in our failure. But why such a significant lapse?

Most likely it was because American armed might has become so powerful and sophisticated, and, in the past, so successful that, on balance, it was



inconceivable that a "9th rate power"--as the DRV/NLF have been called--could endure even gradually applied portions of US power. The extensive and expensive intelligence services were charged primarily with locating and counting the enemy's main forces so that appropriate forms and amounts of firepower could be applied to destroy or attrite them. Even if an enemy gained a temporary advantage through surprise (Pearl Harbor, the Bulge, Tet '68, etc.), he merely exposed himself to eventual destruction due to the great power differential. Even though the US steamroller approach to war in Indochina killed hundreds of thousands, or even a million, enemy troops, it ultimately failed to achieve its aim. Is the basic concept of attrition still sound, requiring only further refinement and sophistication, or does it contain serious flaws?

Only in a small minority of the battles in Vietnam were the US forces outfought, but they were often outthought and outmaneuvered. Despite almost constant movement by US forces on and over the battlefield, the enemy usually retained the initiative as to where and when, and often how, to fight; until late 1969, roughly 85% of the ground contacts were initiated by the enemy. Our side pinned its hopes on the science of war; his--on the art. We concentrated on the material and physical end of the spectrum and, until late, he on the mental and psychological. Our approach was generally direct and his more often indirect. Although the modern American "Way of War" had its genesis in our Civil War, it really gained momentum in World War II; the protracted limited war in Vietnam displayed the overlooked shortcomings of that "Way of War" which in large measure still exist. Or has the battlefield of the future become so visible and so certain that smart weapons will overwhelm smart strategists? Are cleverly and soundly conceived deception/psychological/unconventional operations mere nice-to-have adjuncts (or nuisances) or are they potentially powerful force multipliers? What has really been learned and/or forgotten about countering a sophisticated and pervasive "People's War"?

If, as this study suggests, the American "Way of War" has become imbalanced, what can or should be done to reconstruct a more rational balance between the science and art forms? Appendix D lists some of the

more significant imbalances as well as some of the subordinate issues which are deemed worthy of further serious study.

The BDM study team is well aware of the extreme difficulty in changing, even to a slight degree, patterns and trends in even one service let alone among all four. Moreover, the numerous agencies and influence centers in and out of the government will automatically resist any significant change in present or planned programs. A short-term, all-or-nothing effort to modify imbedded strategic premises most likely would fail. A long-term approach, based on sound historical analysis, would be required to provide the proper climate and soil for fresh thinking to germinate and then to spread. We believe that this BDM effort, despite its human imperfections, provides a useful springboard of relevant data and tentative insights for each of the issues highlighted.

VOLUME I  
THE ENEMY

## THE ENEMY

The leadership of the communist Dang Lao Dong, or Vietnamese Workers Party, maintained the clear-cut, long-range goal of unifying Vietnam and dominating Indochina throughout the duration of the conflict. This remained unalterable and was not negotiable. The so-called Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) was directed by the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) and other similar organizations comprised of members of the Dang Lao Dong leadership. The goals of the VCI, therefore, were identical to those of the leaders of the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam (DRV). Some non-communist elements opposed to the Government of (South) Vietnam (GVN) were part of the VCI-controlled National Liberation Front (NLF), espoused less ambitious goals than did COSVN, and likely would have preferred a degree of autonomy in South Vietnam. Those elements, however, did not wield any real power.

The North Vietnamese leadership remained essentially unchanged throughout the period of the two Indochina Wars (1946-1975) and even the death of Ho Chi Minh in 1969 did not impair the effectiveness of the government. Dedicated Marxists and nationalists, they were determined to oust the French and later the Americans and in so doing they demonstrated their sense of purpose, ruthlessness, perseverance, and ingenuity. Members of the Central Committee of the Dang Lao Dong occasionally disagreed vigorously with each other over strategy, tactics, and other matters, but they skillfully resolved such differences and arrived at group decisions, usually representing a compromise between the opposing factions.

The Viet Minh mobilized large segments of the Vietnamese population in a popular crusade against the French and seized and held the nationalist and anticolonial banners. Under the guise of a land reform program, they imposed stringent controls over the people in North Vietnam after the country's division by the Geneva Accords in 1954. During more than seven years of war against the French they had tested and refined their own version of "People's War" or political-military struggle. Beginning in 1959, thousands of thoroughly indoctrinated military and political

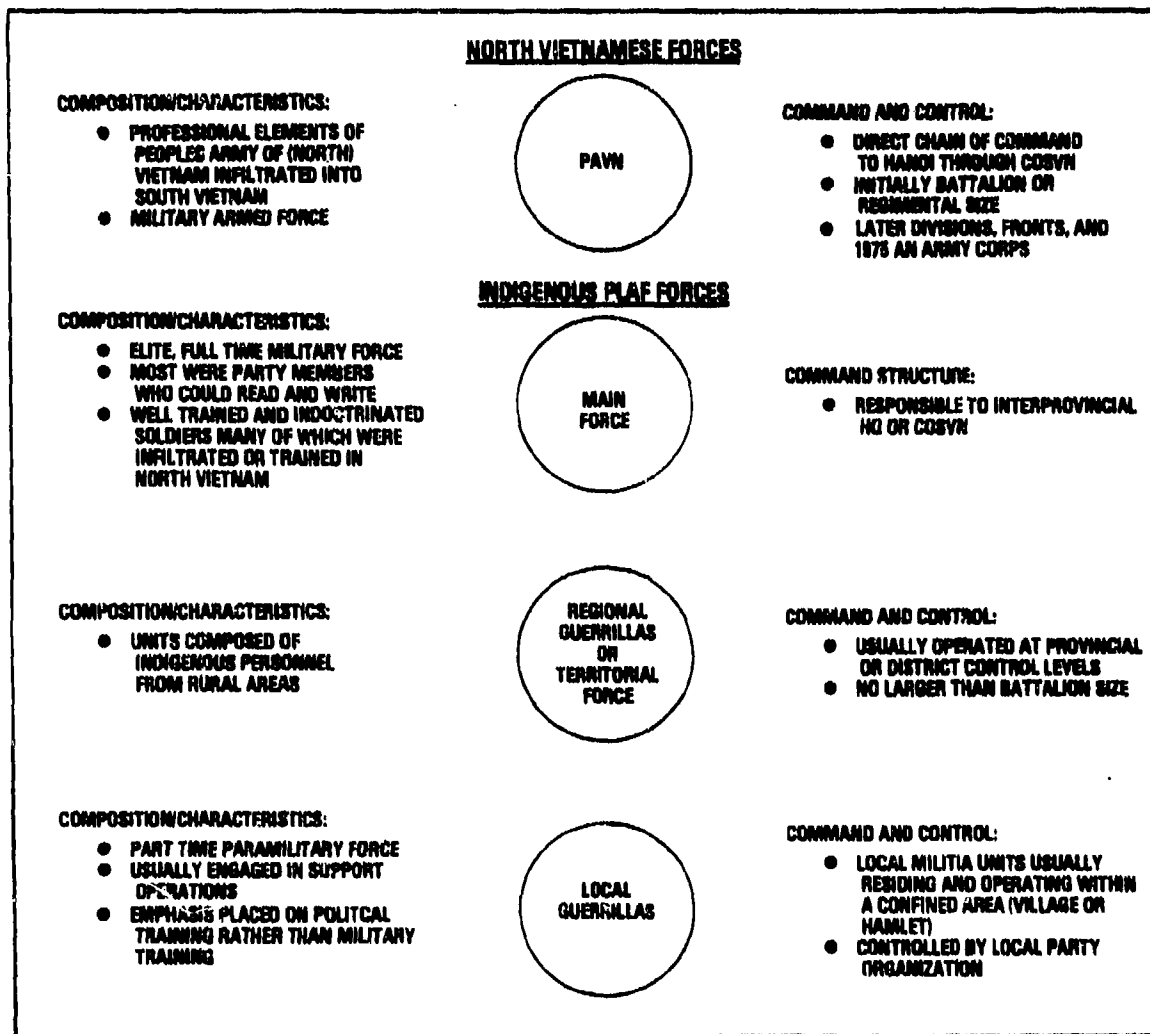
regroupees infiltrated back to South Vietnam where they augmented or directed the stay-behind cadres in actions against the Government of (South) Vietnam (GVN).

Recruitment of South Vietnamese was accomplished in a variety of ways including the use of nationalism, anti-GVN and antiforeign (US) sentiment, the promise of a better and freer life, and, when necessary, outright coercion. The recruiting and proselyting cadres were generally successful until the 1968 Tet offensive which seriously depleted the VCI and People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) ranks. After 1969 the VC posed a much less significant threat to US and RVNAF forces than did the People's Army of (North) Vietnam (PAVN).

Without economic and materiel support from the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China, the DRV could not have sustained a large-scale, modern war effort. Support flowed over the PRC's railroad system, through the port of Haiphong and through Sihanoukville (Kompong Som). These three strategic entry ways remained inviolate until 1970 when General Lon Nol overthrew Prince Sihanouk and closed the Cambodian port. By this time Chinese aid and support had dwindled significantly, but it was not until May 1972 when a US air campaign, Linebacker I, mined Haiphong and other ports and several rivers, that external support was appreciably curtailed. Prior to that strategic interdiction, the North Vietnamese received ample materiel assistance to support their war effort, while simultaneously modernizing their forces and building an impressive combined arms army. US failure to threaten the DRV's national survival and the self-imposed restrictions that prevented strategic interdiction throughout most of the war redounded to the DRV's advantage. The Ho Chi Minh and Sihanouk trails in Laos and Cambodia were developed and expanded to accommodate the ever increasing flow of men and materiel moving into RVN. Losses suffered from US air attacks along the trails were not substantial enough to curtail or materially slow the tempo of operations. Retention of bases and lines of communication in Laos, Cambodia, and areas within RVN, allowed for by the 1973 cease-fire agreement, gave the DRV a geostrategic advantage which proved a major factor in their 1975 victory over the GVN/RVNAF.

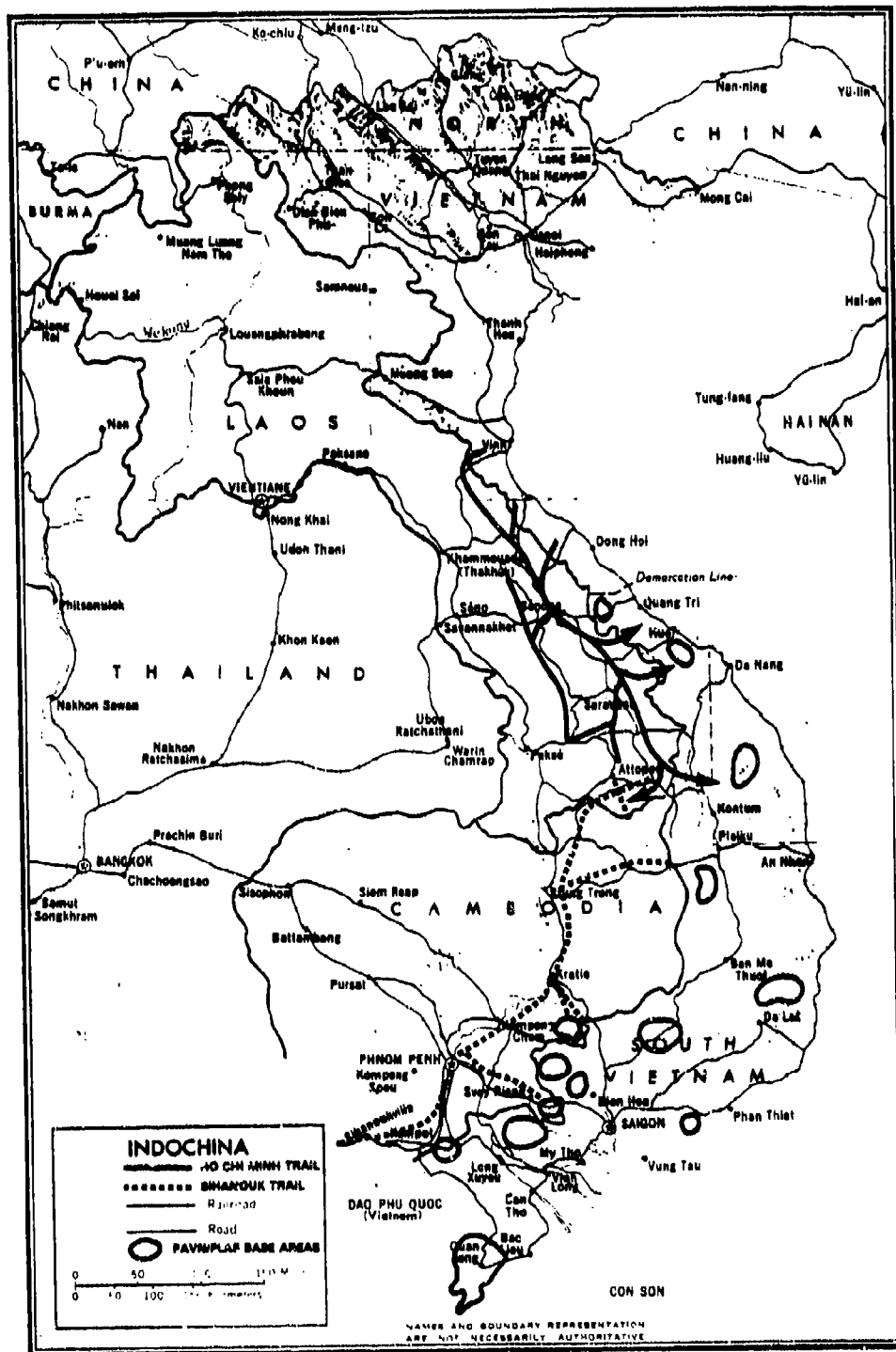
The massive US military presence in RVN through 1971 and the US air power available through 1972 were the major constraints that prevented the People's Army of (North) Vietnam (PAVN) and the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) from seizing RVN. US withdrawal from Vietnam effectively removed those constraints.

Figure I-1 depicts the communist military forces in South Vietnam. Map I-1 shows the general trace of the Ho Chi Minh and Sihanouk Trails and the approximate location of the larger base areas.



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Figure I-1. The Communist Military Forces in South Vietnam



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Map I-1. The Ho Chi Minh and Sihanouk Trail System



### INSIGHTS

#### Long-Range Goals

- The Vietnamese Communists held steadfastly to their long-range goal of national unification under control of the North Vietnamese Lao Dong Party (Dang Lao Dong, or Vietnamese Worker's Party). That ultimate goal was never negotiable, but strategies for achieving that goal were altered, based on the changing internal and external realities.
- The Vietnamese Communists demonstrated flexibility in developing political-military strategies for meeting short-range objectives which could contribute to achieving the ultimate goal of national unification.
- The Vietnamese Communists recognized the importance of seemingly different goals for the range of organizations involved in the struggle against the Saigon government. The variety of goals allowed the communists to attract a wide international audience and to manipulate some South Vietnamese groups.
- The goals of the principal supporters of the DRV, the USSR and the PRC, shifted and diverged over time which created a delicate and potentially critical problem for the Lao Dong leadership.

### LESSONS

The stated long-range goals of an enemy, actual or potential, and especially a communist enemy - may provide valuable clues as to the adversaries strategic, and even tactical, intentions. When the enemy has allies, their separate national goals may be widely divergent, thereby providing an opportunity for exploitation.

Even in a communist nation, the enduring aspirations of the people and their leaders will tend to be nationalistic; in some cases the influence of a nearby major communist power may prevent overt manifestations of nationalism within a small, dependent nation, but it is doubtful that the desire for freedom, as the indigenous population perceives freedom, can be erased.

### INSIGHTS

- Character and Will
- The character and determination of the communist Lao Dong Party leadership in North and South Vietnam were shaped by their common experience and philosophy and matured over an extended period.
  - The Vietnamese Communists established a leadership system that largely overcame the Vietnamese national traits of internecine conflict and even loyalties to family and village. This system provided continuity of leadership through three decades of struggle.
  - Until too late, some U.S. leaders seriously underestimated these critical characteristics, and particularly the strength and determination of the DRV/NLF leaders, and thus sometimes developed ineffective - and often counter-productive - policies and strategies.
  - The fiercely nationalist character of the revolutionaries who comprised the leadership, and their exceptional ability to organize and discipline their followers in the face of massive bombardment and protracted warfare, were underestimated by President Johnson and his advisers when they formulated and implemented the strategy of gradual military escalation.

### LESSONS

Thorough and unbiased analyses of a people's history, society, politics, and leaders should produce useful insights into their national character and will. Without this knowledge, strategies and political "signals" are likely to be ineffective or even counter-productive.

The will of a people to resist an enemy and the ability to endure prolonged hardship and danger have a direct relationship to their perception of the justice of their cause and confidence in their leaders.

To destroy a people's will to resist requires that one or more of the following be accomplished:

- Threaten their national survival. This is construed to mean political and economic defeat as well as military defeat
- Destroy their confidence in the "justice" of their cause and/or the quality and effectiveness of their leaders.
- Demonstrate the improbability of their achieving their objectives, assuming that this capability exists.

INSIGHTS

- Organization • Before and during their war with the French, the Lao Dong leadership developed effective political-military organizations, which were based on general Leninist and Maoist principles, but modified to meet the unique history and environment of Vietnam; in 1960 they created a new organizational structure (NLF) in the South and refined it over time (PRP, PRG, etc.)
- One of Ho Chi Minh's greatest skills was his ability to design, and to use effectively, organizations tailored for the existing - or predicted - environment.
  - The Vietnamese Communists were aware that achieving their goal of unifying their country under communist leadership would be a long-term effort. They worked patiently to establish the base for the long struggle of attrition against their enemies.
  - The Vietnamese Communists established a complex command structure in the South that gave the appearance of having strong regional autonomy, thus gaining substantial international and indigenous noncommunist support. In fact, that structure was controlled from the North by the Communist Lao Dong Party.

LESSON

In a revolutionary context, communist organizations invariably turn to "front" organizations as a means for capturing the support of other non-communist entities that share some common dissatisfaction; a knowledge and understanding of the indigenous situation and existing grievances provides an opportunity for infiltrating a front or exploiting or creating schisms between communist and non-communist elements within a front; however, the communists' organizational techniques are often so well developed that opportunities for exploitation may be rare and fleeting or may depend on an incumbent non-communist governmental apparatus making substantial changes to offer a better alternative than the communists appear to offer.

INSIGHTS

- Mobilization
- The psychological and organizational techniques and skills, tested under fire against the French, were refined and employed with success against the far stronger combination of the US and South Vietnam.
  - From their decision in 1959 to support the war of national liberation in the South until their final victory in 1975, the DRV leaders saw the struggle in the North and the South as one, undivided effort.
  - The Vietnamese Communist leadership capitalized on the US air attacks in the North as a means of developing and maintaining popular support for the mobilization effort in the North.
  - The Vietnamese Communists relied upon outside aid to supplement and complement their own production capacity in ways that permitted flexible response to US bombing initiatives.

LESSON

The keys to effective mobilization of popular support in an insurgency situation lie in dedicated, intelligent leadership, effective organization from top to bottom, sound long-range goals, a "platform" that appeals to a broad segment of the population, and a military strategy that supports and reinforces political aims. Since neither opponent will be absolutely effective across the spectrum, the one which is relatively more experienced, unified, determined, realistic, and consistent will be more successful.

INSIGHTS

Bases, Sanctuaries & LOC

- Strong communist enclaves were established in South Vietnam during the First Indochina War against the French, and the inhabitants maintained strong Party ties with the DRV, thereby providing sanctuaries, safe havens, and operating bases in support of anti-GVN activities; the DRV became the "strong rear" to support the struggle in the South.
- The DRV's military high command, especially Giap and Dung, excelled in logistical planning and execution, particularly in using the sanctuaries of Laos and Cambodia in which they ultimately established all-weather roads and POL pipelines to support their combat forces in the South. Further, during most of the Second Indochina War the DRV made effective use of the Sekong River and RVN coastal waters, as well as the maritime lines of communication into Haiphong and Sihanoukville.
- Use of privileged sanctuaries generally enabled Communist units to avoid combat and limit attrition to their forces as it suited them, thereby making it possible for them to wage a protracted war.
- The closing of Sihanoukville to the DRV in 1970, and the mining of their harbors and waterways in 1972 exposed their near total dependence on, and the vulnerability of, their external LOC.
- The Paris Agreements granted PAVN defacto permission to remain in their bases/sanctuaries in Cambodia, Laos, and even RVN as well as the opportunity to expand, vastly, their LOC to and within the RVN.

LESSONS

The nature, extent, and politico-military implications of an enemy's actual or potential sanctuaries must be studied, analyzed, and understood in order to be in a position to deny him the important advantages conferred by the existence of such sanctuaries.

The initiative, and thus control of the pace of an armed struggle, often lies with a party making use of "privileged sanctuaries" (those areas gratuitously placed "off limits" by a protagonist).

Because of combat-power ratios and other important factors, revolutionary forces are usually dependent on sanctuaries, at least during early phases of their development, and on more sophisticated base areas and lines of communications as hostilities escalate.

INSIGHTS

Outside Support

- Support from the PRC was a major factor in the shifting of the balance of forces in favor of the Viet Minh in the First Indochina War, but as the magnitude and nature of war escalated in the Second Indochina War, DRV dependence on the USSR increased dramatically.
- In spite of the intensifying conflict between Peking and Moscow, the Vietnamese Communists were able to extract adequate military and economic aid in the appropriate mixes to meet the gradually escalating challenge posed by the US
- The US attempted to bring pressure to bear on North Vietnam through negotiations with both Peking and Moscow, while at the same time trying to establish detente with the two major powers. The Vietnamese proved capable of outmaneuvering US efforts and exploiting the Russian and Chinese rivalry to obtain their objectives.
- Though in military and economic terms the Vietnamese Communists were absolutely dependent on external support for accomplishing their objectives in the face of the US presence, their independence of action was not threatened until the following events occurred: The PRC drastically slowed the flow of Soviet materiel passing through China; Lon Nol seized control of Cambodia and closed the port of Sihanoukville to DRV shipments; and the US mined Haiphong and river LOCs.

LESSONS

Major communist powers such as the USSR and PRC have certain vested interests in supporting and ensuring the success of lesser communist nations; this suggests that an opponent of one of their surrogates would be advised not to elect a strategy of attrition unless there was a reasonable assurance of a quick victory or of influencing the external supply of resources and/or use of geographic sanctuaries over a long haul.

A locally based insurgency normally requires extensive external support to offset an adverse balance of military and economic power; this dependence may produce inherent contradictions which, if identified and understood, can present opportunities for exploitation.

INSIGHTS

Constraints  
on Policy

- The Vietnamese Communists were able to overcome most of the significant domestic and international constraints on their activities through their strong leadership commitment to ultimate victory and the flexibility they demonstrated in their efforts to achieve that victory.
- The Vietnamese Communists were strongly aware of the constraints on their actions, and they showed themselves capable of reviewing and altering strategies in order to reach their ultimate objective.
- The Vietnamese Communists showed themselves to be keenly aware of the constraints on US and South Vietnamese actions and they attempted to manipulate those factors to obtain relative advantages on the battlefield, in the war for international public opinion, and at the peace table.
- The massive and essentially unconstrained bombing of North Vietnam in May-October and again in December, 1972, brought the DRV leaders to the peace table and was instrumental in enabling the US to achieve its principal contemporary goals of recovering US POWs and completing its military withdrawal from South Vietnam; that withdrawal ultimately removed the single most important constraint which had helped prevent communist military victories.
- After the 1973 "ceasefire" the constraints in the DRV's freedom of action were minimal, while those facing the South Vietnamese multiplied in every important aspect.

LESSON

All participants in a sustained political-military struggle are faced with a varying mix of internal and external constraints. Successful politicians/strategists develop ways and means to minimize or circumvent the restrictions on their freedom of action while exacerbating and exploiting those facing their opponent(s).

The following summary lesson, while superficially obvious and simple, is one that has been - or should have been - relearned over and over again by political and military leaders throughout recorded history. In numerous cases it has been ignored or misapplied by the physically stronger opponent in a struggle with serious consequences.

OVERALL LESSON

Incomplete, inaccurate, or untimely knowledge of one's enemies (his history, goals, organization, leadership, habits, strengths and weaknesses, and above all, his character and will) results in inferior policies and strategies; raises the cost in time, treasure, anguish and blood; and increases the possibility of the ultimate defeat of one's initial objectives.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY!!!



VOLUME II  
SOUTH VIETNAM

SOUTH VIETNAM

While the North Vietnamese had been molded into a well-regimented society by approximately 1960, the South Vietnamese never succeeded in developing a cohesive, well-knit society. The Southerners were torn by regional, ethnic, cultural, religious and political rivalries and competition. Lacking the experienced leadership forged in the North beginning in 1930 and honed during a decade of combat, the South Vietnamese were unable to achieve any broad sense of national identity or unity. The DRV had preempted the issues of nationalism and anticolonialism, so the GVN was left only with the issue of anticommunism.

The Vietnamese had no democratic traditions as Americans understand democracy, but they had enjoyed an effective form of democratic choice at the village and hamlet level. Unfortunately, President Diem destroyed grass-roots democracy by supplanting local leaders in the provinces with his own chosen appointees. After his murder, the revolving-door governments of South Vietnam were headed by a succession of weak, inexperienced, and inefficient leaders, most of whom emerged from the armed forces but none of whom enjoyed a popular base of support. GVN efforts to assuage the US government by effecting democratic reforms generally proved to be more form than substance.

The GVN's leaders (except for Diem) could not escape the label of having first been French and then US "puppets," hence they were estranged from the population and remained in office only by virtue of US support. Even Nguyen Van Thieu, who showed promising signs of leadership ability, failed to build a power base outside of the military.

When major US combat forces were committed to RVN, the climate of Indochina proved enervating for most Americans. The monsoons had substantial restrictive influence on combat operations, but climatic conditions did not change the course of the war or affect its outcome. The political geography of Indochina proved to a major consideration in the conduct of the war, however, and the end results were very much affected by it. The US fractionalized its politico-military effort according to

the national boundaries in the region, while the DRV sensibly viewed Indochina as a single theater of operations.

RVNAF forces lacked the maturation process that the Viet Minh and later the PAVN/PLAF had experienced under their own communist leadership. RVNAF's early subordination to the French demeaned them in the eyes of most of the South Vietnamese, and it also delayed their opportunities to gain experience and develop the traditions and institutions normally associated with national military forces. The highly politicized high-ranking South Vietnamese military officers were essentially French-speaking urbanites, and all too few proved to be competent leaders in combat or out of it. There was, however, measurable improvement in the efficiency and reliability in many RVNAF units over time, but it was uneven and never sufficient to enable the RVNAF to stand alone. The RVNAF had no strategy or doctrine of their own; instead they drew heavily from the US, but they had neither the means nor the capabilities to implement US strategies without continual US advice and support.

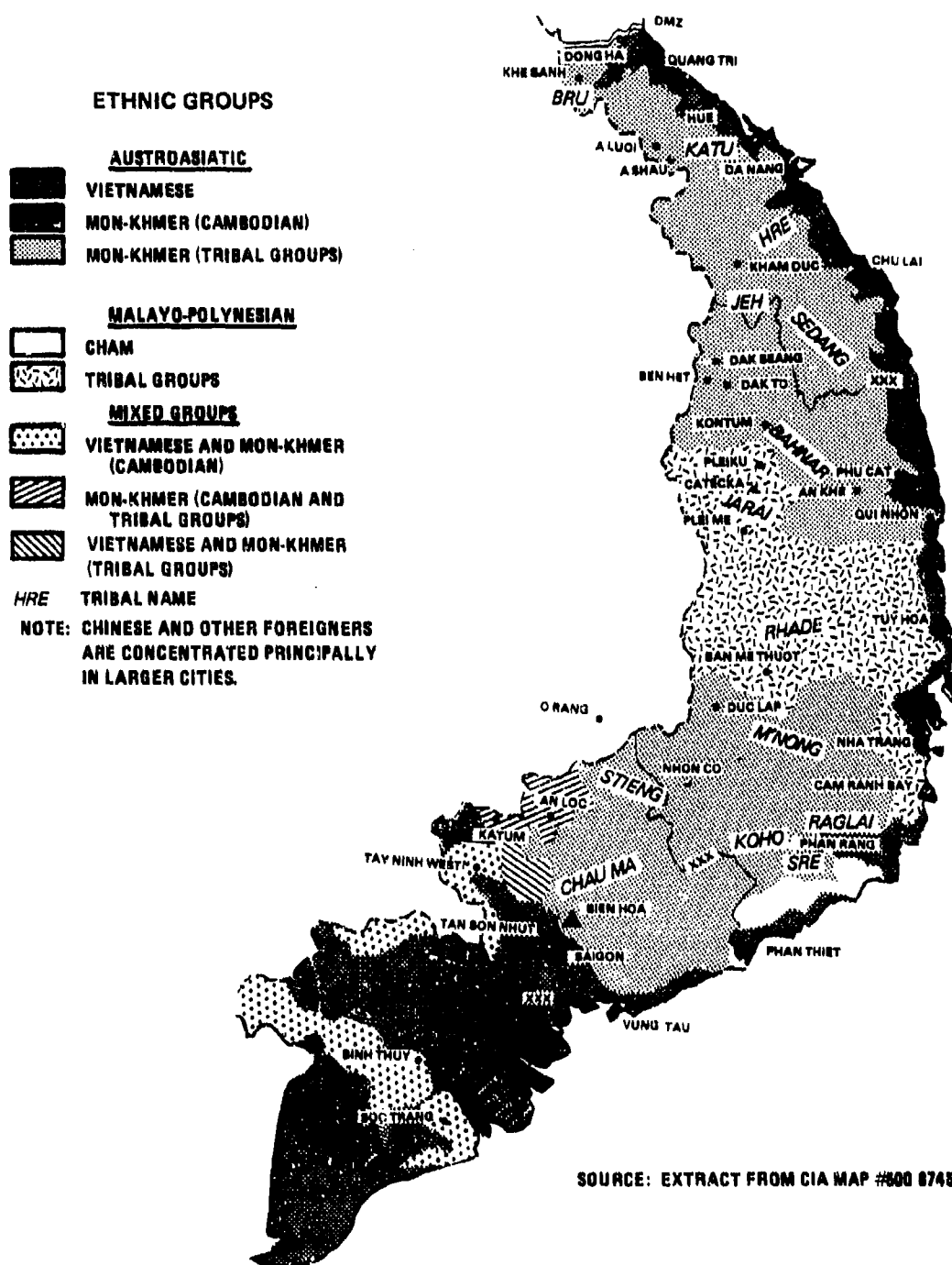
Customs and traditions of South Vietnamese society often constrained GVN's leaders from taking actions that were needed to improve the government or RVNAF's combat efficiency. Political ambition and intrigue continued to play a major role within the top levels of the Vietnamese bureaucracy. Because they were almost totally dependent on US support, the South Vietnamese suffered many of the same constraints that were felt by the Americans. US fear of Chinese intervention or Soviet reprisals led to cautious policies with respect to combat operations against the North. General sensitivity by the US to international opinion discouraged major, overt operations against sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia for most of the war.

The GVN was unable to mobilize its manpower resources fully until after the 1968 Tet Offensive. Prior to that time, the political bases of the several administrations appeared too fragile to risk such a step. Of course, the US controlled RVN's purse strings and virtually dictated what the RVNAF force levels would be. After Tet, the GVN lowered the draft age and rapidly began to expand its forces, with the urging and support of the

US government. In that same period, anti-DRV sentiment was more prevalent than was pro-GVN sentiment, but that feeling translated into substantially improved support for the GVN/RVNAF.

The simple agrarian economy of the Republic of Vietnam was not able to withstand the drains imposed by escalating hostilities, nor was it able to accommodate successfully the massive, affluent, pervasive presence of over 600,000 Americans, Koreans, and others demanding extensive services. The GVN's economy was sustained artificially by the USG, which bore virtually the entire costs of the war. Withdrawal of US forces and the precipitate reduction in US aid and support, which occurred at a time of burgeoning inflation and the 1973 oil crisis, doomed the South Vietnamese economy, while the Soviet Union continued its military and economic support of the DRV at impressive levels.

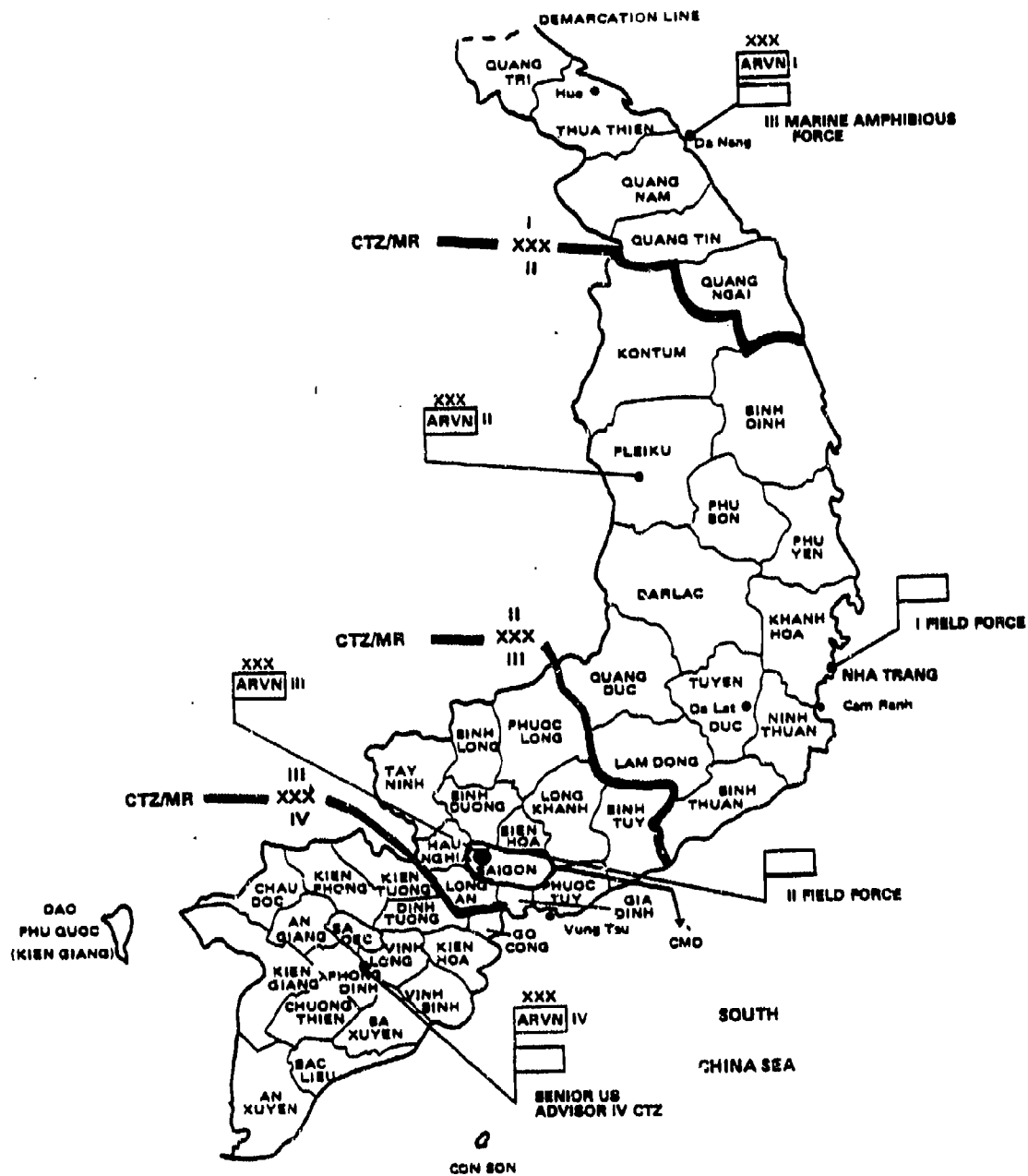
Map II-1 shows the locations of ethnic groups in RVN and Map II-2 delineates the Corps Tactical Zones/Military Regions (CTZ/MR) as of 1966.



SOURCE: EXTRACT FROM CIA MAP #800 874572.

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Map II-1. Ethnic Group Locations in South Vietnamese Society



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Map II-2. Military Geographic Regions, 1966

INSIGHTS

## Society

- Potential forces for unity in the Republic of Vietnam, especially in rural areas, included nationalism, tradition, and, to a degree, anticommunism; and these forces were either:
  - preempted by the NLF (VC), or
  - improperly exploited by GVN (especially after Diem) and/or diminished by the massive US presence
- The overwhelming forces of disunity in RVN included:
  - religious and cultural rivalries
  - urban/rural dichotomy, compounded by the flood of refugees to the cities
  - regional prejudice and favoritism
  - the growing split between the young and the old, especially in the urban areas
  - multiple ethnic divisions and subdivisions
  - proliferation of cliques and political factions
- Weak unpopular leadership, divisive politics, a faltering economy, the lack of a common and compelling goal, and the pressures generated by the nature and pervasiveness of the war tended to split rather than to unite the society.
- The increasing, if reluctant, dependence of the anti-communist segment of the society on US physical and moral support left them psychologically vulnerable when that support was withdrawn.
- The wide differences, historical, cultural, political and environmental, between the American and Vietnamese societies resulted in:
  - significant misperceptions which led to faulty policies by the leaders in both countries, especially during the critical early years of the Diem regime.
  - a general lack of understanding and sympathy in the US for the South Vietnamese which adversely affected support for the protracted conflict. (As the war dragged on and as costs and casualties rose, the generally negative slant of the news media and antiwar groups helped nurture dislike of and disgust with our South Vietnamese allies, especially with their leaders).
  - difficulties between US soldiers and the South Vietnamese which helped fuel anti-US sentiment and riots. (The potential for these emotions always existed since Vietnamese generally distrust foreigners).

- Key officials of both the USG and GVN recognized early the absolute necessity for creating a solid basis for societal unity and nationalism in RVN; differing perceptions of the problems involved, however, often led to conflicting programs aimed at reaching the common end.
- The DRV and the NLF had greater success, overall, in exploiting to their advantage the societal rifts in RVN than did the GVN and the US; the skillful use of front organizations permitted the former to claim with some credibility, both in country and abroad, that they were the only legitimate representatives of all the peoples of Vietnam and that the US was the neocolonialist/imperialistic successor to the French.

#### LESSON

In order to gain the final political-military victory, the leaders of a communist-styled insurgency (People's War) thoroughly analyze and skillfully exploit inherent and potential contradictions in the target society with the aim of alienating large segments of the population, especially in the rural areas, from their government; a powerful ally, which possesses incomplete or incorrect knowledge of that society, tends to interfere with the government under siege and also presents psychological-political opportunities to the opponents.



INSIGHTS

Government

- The structure and operational methods of the GVN initially were influenced by the French, but over time became more Americanized; neither model was suited to the political environment or the managerial styles of the various key leaders of RVN.
- There was an insufficient base - historical, cultural, social and political - to establish an effective Western-style democratic government in RVN, especially in light of internal and external insecurity; there was also a lack of an adequate corps of political leaders - in numbers, character, experience, and political sensitivity.
- The lack of sufficient knowledge of our ally, its opponents, and the nature of the conflict in Indochina - by the USG, the media, and the public - led to unrealistic expectations concerning GVN which inevitably resulted in frustration and contempt, and eventually to withdrawal of support.
- The overthrow of the Diem Regime was one of the very few key watersheds of the Second Indochina War; although Diem might have lost the war eventually, his assassination resulted in:
  - political, military and economic chaos for about three years
  - an irreversible loss of GVN legitimacy and popularity, particularly among the rural peoples
  - massive, prolonged and eventually self-defeating US military intervention
  - erosion of the US moral basis for the war, and conversely a deeper commitment to support the successive governments regardless of their worth
  - the political power in RVN was concentrated among the senior leaders of the RVNAF, and there was no trust or loyalty among themselves or with the Chief of State.

- For different reasons and due to changing circumstances, each separate GVN hindered attainment of US objectives, but since those objectives only periodically and partially coincided with those of the RVN the reverse also was true; Thieu's regime, however, provided sufficient if only temporary strength and stability which permitted the US to withdraw her power with self-proclaimed "honor."
- With numerous exceptions, the working relationships between the USG and GVN at the various levels were characterized by:
  - misunderstandings and even naivety on both sides, initially, at all levels
  - a "teacher-pupil" relationship at the higher levels; Diem, however, refused to accept the latter role, so during his regime it was more akin to two ministers preaching about different religions simultaneously
  - an inept, ineffective, but sometimes arrogant, use of leverage by USG officials
  - more mutual understanding and empathy at the lower levels
  - more acceptance of advice by military than by political leaders due to a common "language" and the fact that the RVNAF leaders were impressed by and dependent on US efficiency and might
  - the rapid turnover and relative inexperience of US advisors

#### LESSON

In the absence of a leadership that can command broad popular support, a Western-style democracy is likely to be inappropriate for an emerging agrarian-based society, especially when that society is vulnerable to heavy internal and external pressures; if the majority of such a country insists on this type of political structure as an inflexible requirement for support, the chances for success decrease sharply.

INSIGHTS

Climate and  
Geography

- There was insufficient appreciation at the Washington level of the constraints imposed by the climate of Southeast Asia on aerial reconnaissance and bombing, and much of the Washington-level planning and target designation was ineffective.
- The geography and climate of Indochina were more suitable to a 'People's' War than they were to conventional military operations and should have exerted more influence on the initial structure and training of RVNAF.
- The two monsoons, which heavily influenced the economies of Indochina, also dictated that military operations be planned on a Wet-Dry Season basis rather than by calendar year.
- The numerous waterways in the Mekong Delta led MACV to resurrect the ways and means of fighting a Riverine war.
- Political geography conveyed strategic advantage to the DRV by making possible the effective use of sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia enabling them to limit casualties and stockpile massive quantities of war materiel.
- The primitive nature of the transportation infrastructure in RVN did not accommodate operations by large, modern military forces with sophisticated equipment; and the US found it necessary to commit vast military and commercial resources to build a new, modern transportation system.
- The US dealt with the Southeast Asian region on the basis of geopolitical boundaries, and consequently fractionalized its political and military efforts; the DRV treated the region as a single theater of operations, thereby gaining the initiative.

LESSON

The peculiarities of climate, topography and political geography, their constraints on military operations, and the possibilities for exploiting those peculiarities politically or militarily in any given region may be viewed in an entirely different way by the protagonists in an armed struggle. It is imperative that these potential constraints and advantages be evaluated from the enemy's perspective as well as one's own and the consequences be assessed.

INSIGHTS

Economy

- Among other shortcomings, too few officials in GVN were experienced, efficient, dedicated, and honest enough to plan for and administer effectively a feeble economy in a wartime environment; whether they ever could have succeeded in doing so during peace is a matter of conjecture.
- The economic warfare tactics pursued by the NLF/PLAF - and later the PAVN - seriously reduced the production, transport, and sale of the RVN's major economic assets - rice and rubber.
- The presence of large numbers of Western troops - French and then even greater numbers of US - modified and strained the agrarian-based economy, and fueled wartime inflation by their insatiable demands for services and retail goods.
- Conversely, this demand for goods and services absorbed many of the unemployed refugees generated by the severe fighting; later the withdrawal of US forces created a huge economic void.
- Massive firepower, search and destroy, defoliation, etc. - created hundreds of thousands of refugees and resulted in severe damage to rice fields, plantations, and forests.
- The extremely heavy manpower demands of the interwoven conventional/unconventional war were in direct conflict with those of the labor-intensive, agrarian economy, particularly in competition for the extremely limited pool of skilled manpower.
- The war, US opulence, numerous indigenous US employees, and import programs created an urban consumer society which, like its government, became increasingly dependent on a large US presence and abundant aid.
- After the 1973 ceasefire, the drastic reductions in US military and economic aid pulled out the only real props which had supported the feeble RVN economy; corruption and the oil embargo added to the spiraling inflation which eventually might have toppled the GVN without a battle.

LESSON

An agrarian-based economy is labor intensive, relatively inflexible, and is acutely sensitive not only to the hazards of nature but also to the demands of large-scale warfare; further it is quite vulnerable, to the Mao-Ho concept of "People's War"; a large, protracted, US presence most likely will contort and eventually cripple such an economy and will force it to become almost totally dependent on massive and sustained US aid.

INSIGHTS

Military

- The RVNAF, especially its senior leaders, were heavily influenced by the French and then by the US; because of this dependency, they never developed an original doctrine or strategy.
- Too many RVNAF leaders became overly dependent on the US advisory network, not only for obtaining fire and logistics support, but also for planning, coordination, and moral support; when this support was withdrawn, the impact was severe.
- In a developing, largely rural nation it is easier and better to train and equip "up", as did the Viet Minh and later the PLAF and PAVN by necessity, than it is to try the reverse, under pressure, as did the RVNAF towards the end; they had "forgotten how to walk" and could no longer afford to ride or fly.
- RVNAF, due to our advice (insistence) and the ineptness of most of their senior leaders, were unprepared, physically and mentally, to meet the enemy at critical stages of the conflict:
  - In the late 1950's and early 1960's they were organized, equipped and trained to fight a possible battle against PAVN, but not the actual struggle against the NLF and the PLAF.
  - In Laos, in 1971, they tried, at our urging, to employ US tactics and techniques without the necessary means, experience or leadership; their ultimate defeat there should have acted as both a warning and a prod.
  - At the onset of the 1972 Easter offensive they were prepared to fight battles at individual "fire support" bases, and were caught by surprise by the massive mobile warfare tactics and equipment employed by PAVN.
  - In 1975, they still had not absorbed the "lessons" of 1971 and 1972 and thus were unprepared again, to fight a large-scale war of movement. (Of course by that time they had neither the means nor the will to defeat the enemy, but they should have done much better than they did.)
- One of our most difficult tasks, and serious failures, was the attempt to build a strong and reliable leadership corps in RVNAF. Given the nature of the social base, the politicization of the military and the background of the senior leaders, the odds for success were not good though the road to failure was not preordained.

LESSON

The political role of the Armed Forces of a nation is critical; military forces which form the political base of a regime are often susceptible to politicization whereby the leaders are chosen, promoted, and favored for political loyalty rather than professional skill. There is a tendency when advising or assisting an emerging nation to organize, equip and train them in one's own image, a pattern which is difficult to alter or reverse if the guiding premises prove to be faulty during a conflict.

INSIGHTS

Morale and  
Will

- Next to general instability and inferiority in leadership, the gravest shortcoming of GVN and RVNAF was their inability to generate and sustain an adequate level of morale; weak leadership was one of the causes of this failure.
- The precipitate nationwide decline in South Vietnamese morale and will from a relative high following the defeat of the communists' 1972 Easter offensive, resulted from the widespread belief that they had been abandoned in an untenable position by the only world power that could stave off their defeat; the rapid collapse of the GVN and RVNAF in the spring of 1975 was due in large measure to the failure by the USG to provide the aid and military support that had been promised.
- Given the prevailing circumstances it was beyond the capacity of the US, itself suffering leadership and morale problems, to impart to the RVNAF a sufficiently high level of morale and will to enable RVNAF to prevail.

LESSON

The Second Indochina War dramatically demonstrated the importance of good morale. An external power cannot easily generate morale and determination within another society, it can, however, create, even unintentionally, false and fragile hopes that if dashed will adversely affect these important qualities.

# INSIGHTS

## Constraints on Policy

- The RVN, from beginning to end, never possessed anything like the leadership, experience, cohesiveness, organization, and determination (ruthlessness) of their enemies - the DRV and the NLF - and never had a sufficient mandate or the strength to compete as an equal.
- Even in their most hopeful periods - the mid years of the Diem and Thieu regimes - the national, political, and economic bases of power were narrow and fragile.
- Without substantial US support, the RVNAF were seldom a match for their enemies because of an overall lack of solid leadership and self confidence.
- By becoming totally wedded to US tactics and techniques, the RVNAF were relatively helpless when deprived of the ways, means and experience which make the US system effective.
- Both the GVN and the RVNAF became too closely identified with the French and then with the US to retain a serious chance of establishing themselves as true nationalists; the anticommunist theme lacked strength and direction.
- The January 1973 ceasefire, which permitted PAVN and PLAF forces to remain "in place" (the leopard spots) throughout key areas in South Vietnam, placed the RVN in an untenable geo-strategic position; the RVNAF was spread too thinly throughout their territory, lacked a strategic reserve, and could not mass sufficient forces quickly enough to counter multiple heavy attacks.
- The drastic reduction of US economic, military, and political support following the "peace with honor" produced a rapid deterioration of the physical and moral strength of both the GVN and the RVNAF; by January 1975 only a miracle could have saved the RVN from total defeat.
- In summary, the constraints facing RVN were formidable by any standards. Many of them were inherent in their society and politics while others were imposed by their enemies. While US misperceptions and incorrect policies inhibited their freedom of action, RVN could not and did not survive without US support.

## LESSON

In today's global environment, the freedom of action of all nation states is constrained by both internal and external pressures, but an emerging nation - lacking a unifying cause and strong leadership - is so severely circumscribed as to be nearly impotent without a powerful and consistent sponsor; depending on the wisdom and continuity of its policies and actions, that sponsor can either ameliorate or compound the constraints facing its ally.



OVERALL LESSON  
FOR VOLUME II

The United States is likely to do itself and its ally more harm than good if it commits its power and prestige to the preservation of a weak and struggling nation without first understanding and interpreting correctly the client state's history, culture, economy, environment, political dynamics, and potential enemies - both external and especially internal; the United States must understand its own strengths and weaknesses and evaluate their likely impact on a fragile, underdeveloped society and its institutions. This generality, however, does not provide policy makers with a built-in rationale for inaction or vacillation when vital issues or interests are at stake.

VOLUME III

US FOREIGN POLICY AND VIETNAM 1945-1975

US FOREIGN POLICY AND VIETNAM 1945-1975

The period immediately after World War II was marked by the strong desire for an effective international system; it also witnessed an attempt by national policy makers to reconcile US anticolonialist and anticommunist policies. Inconsistencies in policy served to undermine the effectiveness and credibility of the United States. For instance, the US World War II objective of defeating the Japanese served as the basis for cooperation and friendship between US forces in Southeast Asia with Southeast Asian, particularly Vietnamese, nationalists. Yet, after their common enemy had been defeated, the predominantly Eurocentric US policy perspective reasserted itself, to the disappointment of the Vietnamese nationalists.

The US-French relationship, from 1945 through the French exit from Indochina in the mid-1950's, illustrates the difficulties faced by US policy makers. Fearing a French refusal to participate in US-sponsored European defense programs, American policy makers "appeased" France with regard to French territorial claims in Indochina. Throughout that period the US was dedicated to European economic recovery. Soviet encroachments in Eastern Europe and refusal to participate in European recovery or defense gave impetus to the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. Collective security became the watchword, focusing mainly on NATO and reflecting the Eurocentric bias.

US interests in Asia called for the replacement of Japan by Nationalist China as the dominant and stabilizing force and the remodeling of Japan into a peaceful nation which would forswear the use of offensive weapons. The defeat of Chiang Kai-shek by Mao Tse-tung in 1949 alarmed US leaders and made the Truman administration vulnerable to charges that it had "lost" China. This precedent has had lasting impact, particularly on Democratic administrations.

With the outbreak of the Korean war and China's subsequent intervention, national leaders saw the advance of monolithic communism as the major threat to US interests and objectives. The US strategy of "massive

retaliation" and the "liberation" doctrine ("roll back") earmarked the US for the role of "world policeman." Although there was considerable tension between the US and the USSR even after the Korean war ended, a perceptible softening in the rhetoric of "massive retaliation" and "liberation" occurred, illustrating the US policy makers' gradual approach to arms limitations and the reduction of international tensions. In 1961 a new strategy appeared, "flexible response," which included counterinsurgency to fight what Khrushchev termed "wars of national liberation."

Historical precedents played an important part in helping to shape US policies. The "loss of China" adage was frequently, if not excessively, utilized by US policy makers in warning against such a "loss" in Southeast Asia, particularly with regard to Vietnam. The fear of possible political repercussions if another nation were to be "lost" to communism served to justify the US commitment to Vietnam. Both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were particularly fearful of the implications that another "loss" would have for their presidencies and for their political party as a whole.

The US experience in handling the Cuba and Berlin crises stressed the virtue of dealing firmly with an adversary, employing gradual coercion tightly controlled by the president to elicit a desired response. Senior civilian officials in the USG became directly and often overly involved in what previously had been purely the military's province. Modern communications made it possible for Washington-level officials to speak directly with low-level tactical commanders. The politico-diplomatic lessons derived from those crises were then applied to the insurgency problems in Vietnam. It is arguable, however, that the lessons were not wholly applicable to the situation in Indochina. A crisis situation differs significantly from aggression evolving as it did in Vietnam during the 1960's. Additionally, while time limits and cautious US threats of nuclear retaliation apparently prompted the USSR to meet the US demands regarding Cuba and Berlin, such strategies were inappropriate for dealing with Hanoi. A Third World country which perceives it has little to gain but much to lose by acquiescing to a superpower's demands (in this case those of the US) cannot be expected to respond "appropriately" to a strategy designed for use in

superpower confrontations. Broadly speaking, strategies useful in the superpower arena may be wholly unsuitable for engendering change in or achieving compliance from a Third World country.

Of the lessons derived from the Bay of Pigs experience, it appears US national policy makers learned the lesson of "resolve" the most readily. The Bay of Pigs experience should have cautioned against military and/or political involvement in a country prior to cultivating a thorough appreciation of the political realities in that country. The invasion's failure also should have illustrated the potential liabilities and risks in proceeding with an amateurish operation plan. Finally, the experience should have cautioned against supporting or condoning a coup unless the outcome is predictable and favorable. The ill-fated coup against President Diem in 1963 was carried out with US connivance, but the US officials who encouraged it had no clear picture of what the results would be. Moreover, US complicity had the effect of forging a commitment to the succession of Vietnamese generals who so ineptly followed Diem. Of all of the US mistakes made in the course of hostilities in Indochina, acquiescing in the Diem coup ranks as one of the gravest.

Fear of provoking Communist China to intervene on behalf of Hanoi permeated US policy deliberations regarding military operations in and over Vietnam during the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations. The PRC's reported massing of troops in 1954 and Peking's protracted vocal militancy during the 1960's forewarned US policy makers that the Chinese leadership could indeed be provoked. India's intermittent difficulties with China illustrated Peking's resolve to pursue boldly its national policy objectives. It is plausible, however, that Peking's militancy, both verbal and physical, was displayed by the Chinese leadership for the purpose of gaining international credibility at politically opportune moments. President Kennedy's observation that "appearances contribute to reality" may have had its Communist Chinese proponents as well. Generally speaking, high-level US observations as to the nature of the Chinese threat during the years of US military involvement in Vietnam were generally based more on presumption than reality. The fact that both the political rift between

Peking and Moscow and the cultural enmity between the Vietnamese and Chinese were largely unappreciated throughout the conflict serves to substantiate this insight.

Presidents were the key decision makers on Vietnam policy. Each of the post-World War II presidents considered himself to be the one ultimately responsible for the determination of all foreign policy, though with respect to Vietnam, each chose to involve the Congress to different degrees. Eisenhower would involve the Congress in the formulation of policy provided that there was not a "sudden, unforeseen emergency," presumably so deemed by himself, in which case the Congress would not necessarily be involved. His approach contrasts significantly with that employed by Nixon who tended to ignore the Congress on matters of Indochina.

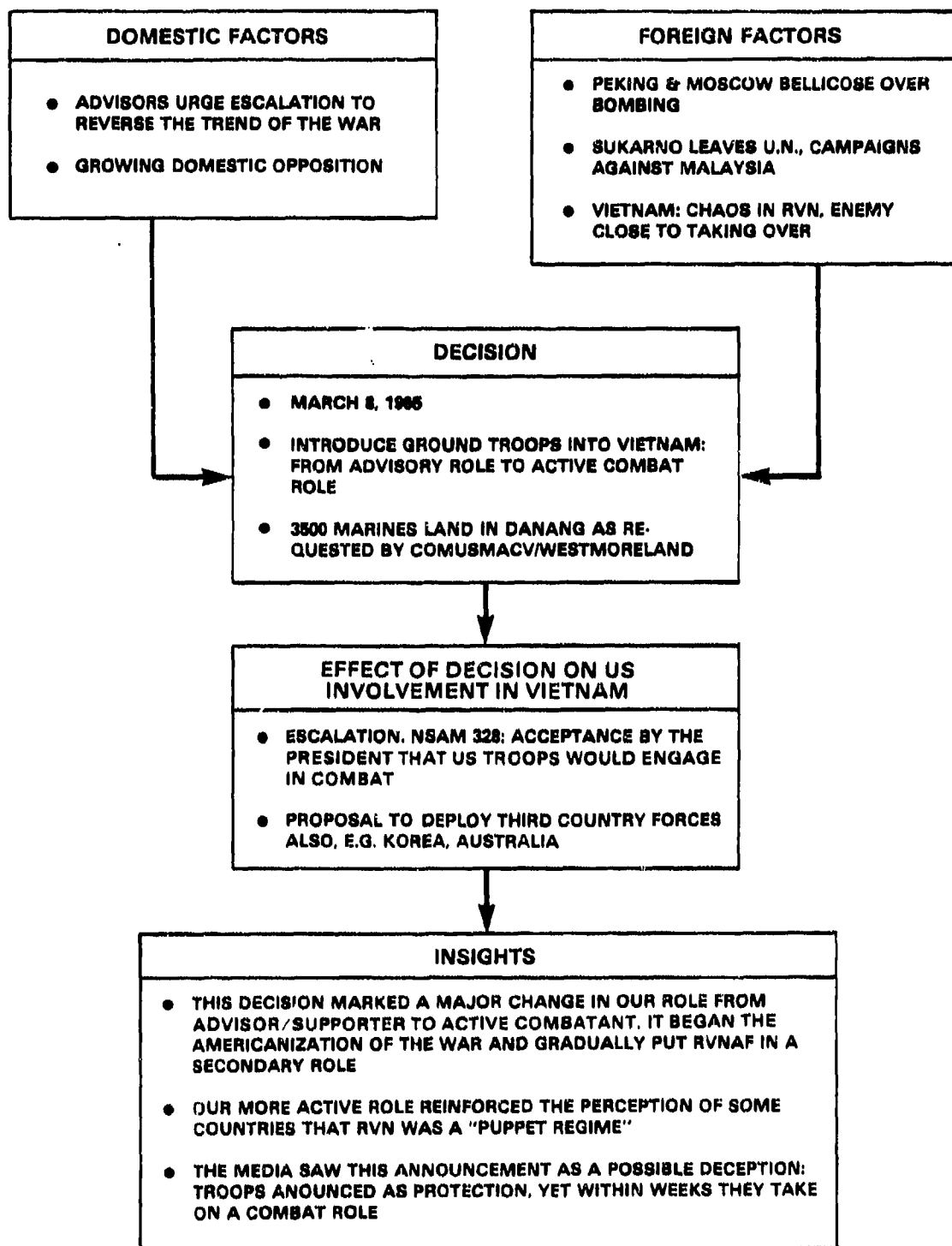
All of the presidents had lived through the crises in Munich, Poland, Yalta, the "loss" of China, the Korean War, and the McCarthy era. Each drew the lesson that the United States could not afford to be soft on communism, specifically that he could not be the president who permitted the "loss" of Vietnam to communism. Their close advisers reinforced their own anticommunist orientation. There is no question that the presidents and their advisers were conditioned by such past experiences when considering how to deal with the conflict in Vietnam.

Like leaders in any organization, presidents are not immune to confusing dissent with disloyalty. The Vietnam experience should point to some of the dangers in such confusion. Premises fail to receive the critical examination they require in formulating a sound policy that keeps pace with changes in a dynamic world. There was a time when monolithic communism may have justified the anticommunist approach of the US in the 1950s. Equally, it seems possible that the US might have tailored its policy toward Vietnam more closely to observable changes in the Sino-Soviet relationship earlier than it did (during the Nixon presidency). Unfortunately, the investment of US political, economic and military prestige and credibility not to mention US casualties and POWs, came to override the intrinsic importance of Vietnam to the US. Equally unfortunate was the

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ultimate position of the US Congress which reduced aid and support to the GVN, thereby helping to consign that ally to its final defeat and rendering US foreign policy suspect.

See Figure III-1 for an illustration of key factors associated with US entry into RVN with combat forces.



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Figure III-1. Illustration of the Key Factors Associated with US Entry in RVN, 1965



INSIGHTS

US Foreign  
Policy and  
Vietnam,  
1945-1975

- The early years of US involvement in Southeast Asia witnessed an attempt by national policy makers to reconcile US anticolonialist and anticommunist policies, generally at the expense of the former.
- During the time period under consideration, the US found itself constrained by perceptions of its own leadership role in the world and by its perceptions of threats to US objectives.
- The United States' post-WW II assumption of the role of "global policeman," aimed at combatting international communism in the post-World War II era, limited its appreciation of other forces at work in the global environment, particularly that of nationalism.
- Inconsistencies or abrupt changes in US policies undermined the effectiveness and credibility of the United States. In addition, the United States' long-held Eurocentric policy perspective diminished overall US effectiveness in fashioning viable policies outside of Europe.
- The broad US objective of containing communism globally conflicted with the US objective to promote self-determination for and civil liberties in the world's former colonies in general and in South Vietnam in particular. Perceptions of the monolithic communist threat frequently clouded the differences between civil wars, colonial wars, and what the communists termed "wars of national liberation."
- Foreign policy terms such as "vital interest," "objective," and "threat" were often applied without careful discrimination by US national policy makers, thus leading to oversimplification, contradictions, and confusion in US foreign policy.

LESSON

The importance of particular US interests may undergo significant changes, depending upon a broad array of international and national considerations, often beyond the control of the United States Government. To minimize confusion at subordinate levels of leadership, US national leaders must be as clear, precise, and discriminating as possible in determining "vital" interests, especially prior to making a long-term commitment to another nation or government.

INSIGHTS

Historical  
Precedents  
Which  
Influenced US  
Involvement In  
Vietnam

- The Chinese threat perceived by the US was more assumed than real. For example, throughout the period of US involvement in the Vietnam conflict the significance of the political rift between the USSR and the PRC and the cultural enmity between the Vietnamese and Chinese was consistently understated.
- The admonition that the US must not "lose" South Vietnam (like it "lost" China) was often used by US policy makers to justify the US commitment to Southeast Asia. The fact that the term "loss" implied previous control or hegemony by the US over China reinforced the United States' perception of its post-World War II role as the free world's global policeman, and of the nature of global politics as "bipolar," where a "loss" by the US was considered a gain for world communism.
- Tendencies toward moderation and compromise in Vietnam policy making were sometimes discredited by being compared with "appeasement" of Hitler at Munich in 1938.
- Policies and strategies proven effective in superpower confrontations may be wholly inapplicable to problems in the Third World.
- Several important lessons provided by the Bay of Pigs experience were neglected: first, prior to committing military and/or political resources to a given country, a thorough assessment of political and social realities in that country should be undertaken. Second, there are significant risks inherent in restricting the scope and employment of military resources in a given operation. US lack of knowledge about Asia and Asians helped lead to faulty perceptions, as did a lack of understanding about the goals, etc. of Cuba and Cubans.

LESSON

It is essential to know precisely the nature of relationships between Third World countries and external communist powers - a corollary to the "Know Your Enemy" and "Know Your Ally" lessons underscored in Volumes I and II. US policy makers must carefully examine the premises upon which they formulate any US policies.

INSIGHTS

US National-  
Policy  
Makers and  
the Policy  
Making Process

- Pressures to arrive at timely decisions militate level against the possibility of obtaining expert advice on all sides of every issue. However, when expert advice is available but is continually ignored because of an assertion that timeliness is crucial, then the validity and implications of this assertion deserve careful scrutiny.
- The US Congress indicated its dissatisfaction with the executive branch's performance in foreign policy, especially with regard to Southeast Asia, by reducing aid to South Vietnam and Cambodia, thereby using its "power of the purse" to shape future US commitments to the region.
- Presidents, like other leaders, sometimes confused dissent over Vietnam policy with personal disloyalty or lack of patriotism.
- General beliefs about the dangers of "appeasement" and of global communist unity and expansionism, conditioned by experiences such as Munich, Yalta, Korea, and the McCarthy era, frequently served as the basis for US Southeast Asian policy formulation, often regardless of the political, cultural, traditional, or ideological realities in the region.
- All decision makers are human and fallible and adopt a decision-making process with which they feel comfortable. While good organizations and procedures cannot ensure sound decisions, weak ones are more likely to produce bad policies and decisions.

LESSON

The American experience in Vietnam points to the danger of elevating one fundamental principle -- anticommunism -- to the status of doctrine and of applying it to all regions of the globe. This reduces the possibility of meaningful debate and limits the airing of legitimate dissenting viewpoints. Careful and continual reexamination of US foreign policy premises may forestall this potentially dangerous development from occurring in future policy deliberations.

OVERALL LESSON

US national leaders, both civilian and military, must continually assess the validity and importance of the policies they are pursuing. In particular, they must assess the changing implications of these policies for particular foreign countries and regions and determine the political, military, and economic prices that they are likely and willing to pay for successful policy implementation. Assessments of this nature will foster the creation and/or revitalization of strong, mutually beneficial alliances, thereby providing an element of continuity and constancy to US foreign policy. Moreover, the national leadership should continually assess its willingness to accept the responsibility for policy failures, especially if it is unwilling to pay the price called for by a given policy. US national leadership must, therefore, conduct continual and honest reassessments of the premises of its national policy in light of changing circumstances in both bipolar and multipolar relationships.

VOLUME IV  
US DOMESTIC FACTORS INFLUENCING VIETNAM  
WAR POLICY MAKING

US DOMESTIC FACTORS INFLUENCING VIETNAM WAR POLICY MAKING

US Vietnam war policies were formulated in response to the evolving situation in Southeast Asia and to other international pressures. The changing US domestic political environment also strongly influenced the nature and style of the war-related decisions of the successive administrations that struggled with the intractable problem of the Vietnam war. The presidents who had to make decisions pertaining to Vietnam were reacting not only to the recommendations of their advisors, who were cognizant of international pressures, but also to the less abstract domestic political problems of preserving political alliances and of expanding their political bases. The Vietnam war demonstrated the extent to which foreign policy decision making had become centralized in the presidency.

The data available from opinion polls taken in the 1960's and 1970's indicate that public support for the Vietnam War crested late in 1965. Thereafter, in notably gradual steps, the support ebbed, and the tide of opposition rose. By mid-1966 it was evident that the application of American military power, particularly as it was employed, would not produce a quick end to the war. The hopes that US airpower would cripple North Vietnam or break the will of its communist leadership faded. At the same time, American fighting men were taking on ever-expanding roles in the land war on the Asian mainland.

Public support for the war itself ebbed, but the presidents were able to evoke strong showings of public support in opinion polls for specific actions be it escalation or de-escalation. Thus, though support for the war as a policy was weak during the Nixon Administration, the president was able to elicit majority support for his strong military actions like the invasion of Cambodia or his negotiation efforts, especially when related to reduction of US casualties or the plight of the POWs.

Examination of public opinion shows that the decline of support for the war, especially after the initial slump of late 1965-early 1966, was strikingly gradual; and, over the long-term, was not related to turns of events either on the battlefield or in the United States. Youths,

intellectuals, and laboring people all seem to have shared similar patterns of declining support for the war, and blacks consistently expressed lower levels of support than did the general population. The more educated members of society were more volatile in their fluctuations of opinion than the less educated.

As US troops went ashore in 1965 despite prior press and congressional complaints over the president's obfuscation of US activities in Indochina, there was still a general consensus on the need to "halt aggression" in Southeast Asia. Even the most critical newsmen in Saigon did not question the need for US involvement; they criticized tactics, the GVN and RVNAF, secrecy, weaknesses and other operational aspects. It was the early 1966 Fulbright hearings that gave respectability to criticism of the US policy in Vietnam. The New York Times pressed hard for "negotiations." If the major media did not become "dovish", they gradually became more critical and more willing to print the critics' views.

Presidential behavior and the plausibility of presidential policy are the key to understanding media treatment--with its Washington orientation--of the Vietnam war as a whole. Because the "hawk" side of the debate had no "respectable" or vocal champions (as does the hawk side of the SALT debate) in Congress, the JCS position on what was needed to "win" was rarely aired; the debate in 1965-68 was depicted as a fight between the administration and its dovish critics (at least until George Wallace came along in late 1968). Hence, a second point must be noted; each major policy alternative must have a respectable spokesman in Washington for it to be reflected in the media and this spokesman must have an articulate, well-informed group in Congress, particularly if the issue is an alternative to administration policy. No such group existed to reflect the JCS view on Vietnam in 1965-68.

One should not ignore the "class" bias of the major media. Print media tends to be directed at the college-educated upper-middle-class. Television reporting is aimed at a much wider middle American audience but attempts to be as journalistic as the major print people. It is unlikely that the major media (as opposed to AP and UPI, the great feeders of all

media) will ever share the tastes and values of most members of Congress or of most people in the Pentagon.

Washington reaction or policy stories received more TV time and newspaper space on Vietnam than did reporting out of Vietnam itself. The politics and policy stories, featuring as they did the presidents and their critics, had more appeal to editors/TV producers than did seemingly repetitious stories about faraway places. That tendency thereby magnified the president's behavior, as perceived by the media, and tended to emphasize Washington/domestic rhetoric and reaction to trends and events rather than the trends and events themselves. Portrayed in extreme form during the 1968 Tet crisis, that tendency persisted throughout the war. Presidential performance, the reaction of Congress, and the "atmosphere" within the administrations tended to have the upperhand as stories were chosen.

The shattering of consensus over the Vietnam War issue shook the nation to its roots and by 1968, with urban riots, public assassinations, campus unrest, massive antiwar and antigovernment demonstrations, etc., there seemed to have been genuine reason to question the vitality of the nation and its institutions. Since that time this nation has continued its dialectical evolution and absorbed many elements of the challenge that was posed in the 1960s. The nation is more stable now, but it is also vastly changed in the way it perceives itself, individuals within it, and its place in the world.

While the social changes of the 1960s have led the country to a new understanding of American social life and to a new stability, the economic changes of that period have brought no such stability to the American economy in the 1980s. The economic woes of the present are in large measure a legacy of our involvement in the Vietnam War, specifically, the results of the way in which we chose to finance the war. Defense spending at the height of the war accounted for 9 percent of GNP, of which the war itself accounted for only 3 percent. Because of the relatively small size of this commitment it was not necessary to mobilize the economy in the same manner as during World War II or even the Korean War. By doing the opposite, though, and almost completely disregarding the impact of the war



on the domestic economy--for example, not even instituting a significant tax to compensate for the war-related increase in aggregate demand until 1968-- the Johnson Administration (with assistance from Congress) added to the economic problems the US had to face in the late 1960s and the 1970s. Regardless of the war and the presence or absence of war-related economic planning, the US was faced with such problems as a diminishing international economic role (in relative, if not absolute terms), the end to an era of cheap energy, and the trend towards the increased production of services relative to goods. To these were added the legacy of inflation which plagues us today even more than at the height of the Vietnam War.

The truth of the matter is that the economic policies made necessary by the Vietnam War were not politically viable. Either the war or the economy had to give and, given the political commitment of successive administrations "not to lose Vietnam," it was the economy that was sacrificed. In retrospect this seems shortsighted, but given the structure of the US political system it is difficult even now to see how the decision could have been otherwise, at least when considering the roster of key participants.

The efforts of Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon to produce a settlement in Vietnam that would be compatible with larger US foreign policy results, produced a series of tragic ironies for all three of the presidents. Each of these men sought to ensure domestic political backing and public support for his policies, but in the end those policies became the most divisive elements the United States had experienced in this century.

Kennedy had sought in his presidency to reassert the moral leadership of the United States as the leader of the Free World. He had proclaimed during his campaign that the United States would bear any burden to ensure that freedom prevailed against tyranny around the globe. Tragically, these lofty goals were extraordinarily difficult to realize in the complicated situation Kennedy found in Southeast Asia, and his administration became implicated in acquiescing to the coup d'etat that ended in the assassination of President Diem of South Vietnam. Moreover, at the same time

Kennedy was enunciating noble goals for US foreign policy, he was attempting to "downplay" the size of the commitment he was making in Southeast Asia by trying to quiet reporters who attempted to describe what they were observing in Vietnam.

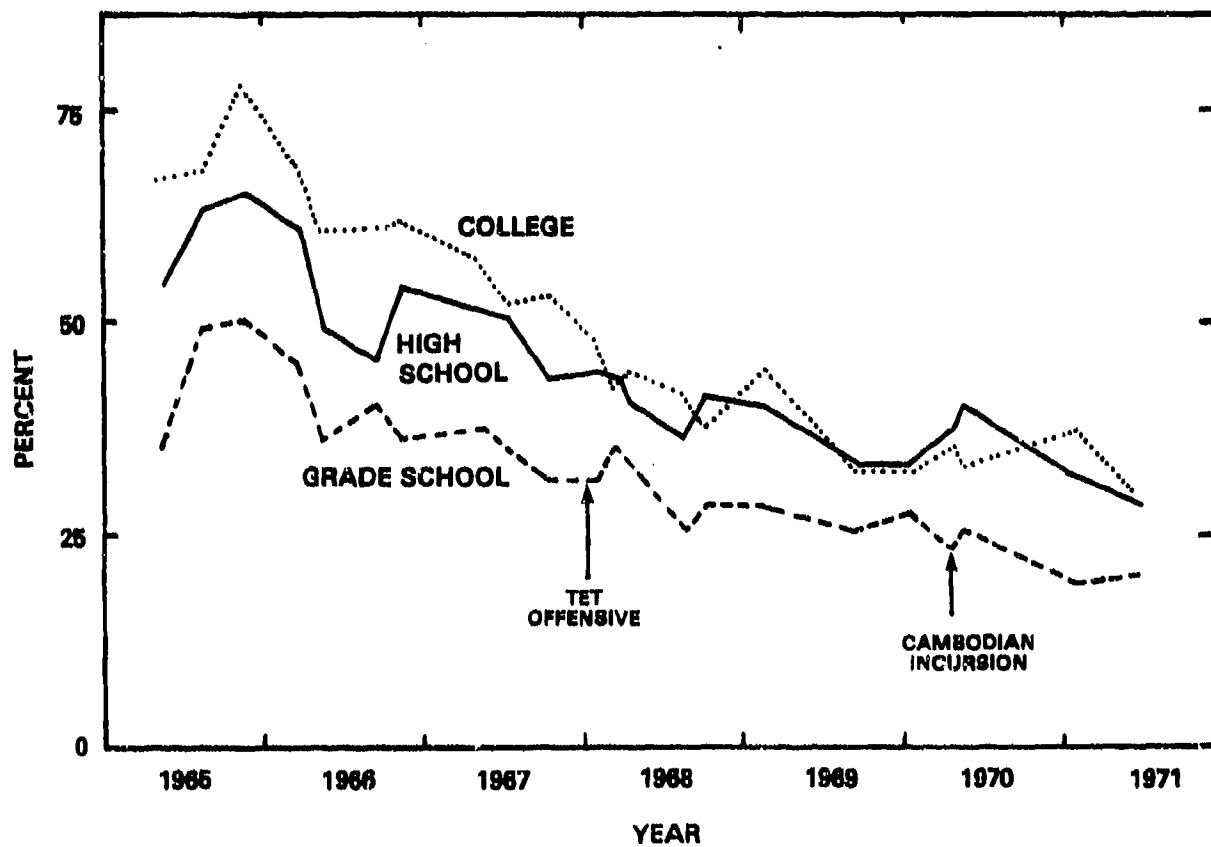
Johnson also set out in his presidency to realize the enactment of far-reaching and humanitarian legislation. To ensure the passage of that legislation, Johnson sought to cover up or minimize the depth and extent of the US involvement in the conflict in Southeast Asia. In accomplishing his purpose, he could not be candid about either military planning or the economic costs that would be entailed in the involvement. The result of this obfuscation was a rapid unravelling of Johnson's political position as elements within his coalition began to dissent from his policies. Johnson had sought to continue and expand the social welfare programs Kennedy had begun. He also had sought to pursue the economic policies Kennedy had helped design but failed to enact. Finally Johnson set out to maintain the forceful application of US military power that Kennedy had seen as essential to the accomplishment of US foreign policy objectives. In retrospect, the incompatibility of Johnson's separate goals is apparent; one by one each of the three elements of his program failed as he cut back on his cherished Great Society programs and sacrificed domestic price stability in the hope that the war would be short. In the end, the domestic political debate that his policies engendered, the economic and social failures associated with his policies, and his failure to produce a quick military resolution of the Vietnam situation put such extreme political pressure on Johnson that he felt obliged to retire from public life.

Johnson had sought to occupy the middle ground in any debate and to use his manipulative skills as a parliamentarian to influence political outcomes. It is ironic that Johnson's demonstrably successful 1964 attack on the political right personified by Barry Goldwater was an important element in his political difficulties in 1967-1968. Without a strong, credible, and vocal right to offset the growing power of the left in American politics, Johnson's political balance was upset, and he himself came to represent the most hawkish element in the political debate about the course that should be taken in Vietnam.

Nixon's administration was also marked by political ironies concerning his intended political programs. Nixon had sought to drive the political left into a corner while he occupied the right and center of American politics. This allowed him to command a "new majority" that he hoped would be an element in arresting and then reversing the growing ascendancy of the Democratic Party. Nixon succeeded in developing a political base that made him immune to liberal and left-wing criticism - the criticism that had hardened Johnson in his attempts to resolve the Vietnam situation. In the end, however, when his political enemies identified Nixon with the Watergate scandal, they succeeded in bringing him down. The result was that the political base which Nixon had assembled also collapsed, and thus President Ford could not reintroduce US combat power in RVN as Nixon had promised he would do if the North Vietnamese seriously violated the 1973 cease-fire and threatened the existence of the GVN.

With the decline of both the bipartisanship of the World War II years and of the Democratic leadership within Congress, the consensus that could have been forged between Congress and the presidency in the 1960s never occurred. President Johnson's lack of candor with Congress regarding Vietnam and the fragmentation of congressional politics had disrupted Congress. From 1966 onward, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee headed by Senator Fulbright sought to develop a consensus within Congress, to constrain the president. The strength of this committee in drawing public and congressional attention to the issues of the war and presidential use of his war powers served to give respectability to a point of view that opposed administration policies in the war. In a sense, the committee, through its hearings, publicized the more general need for Congress to regain control of its oversight responsibilities regarding US foreign relations. Ultimately those hearings contributed to congressional reassertion of its authority and fiscal powers in matters of foreign policy; possibly the pendulum swung too far. The War Powers Act has yet to receive a constitutional test.

Figure IV-1 shows trends in support for the war.



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SOURCE: Based on War, Presidents and Public Opinion

Figure IV-1. Trends in Support for the War in Vietnam, by Education

### INSIGHTS

Support for  
the war

- From 1950 to 1965, the American public was not particularly concerned with military events in Vietnam; only career US military and civilian personnel were involved on a comparatively low-key basis in Vietnam, and media attention and public opinion polls on the matter were insignificant. There was neither strong public support for nor opposition to USG policies and presence in Vietnam.
- With the escalation of the Vietnam War, general public support ebbed. Yet presidents were still able to evoke strong showings of public support in the opinion polls for decisive actions in specific situations whether those actions were escalatory or deescalatory.
- Polarization of opinion on the war between the young and the educated people on one hand and the blue collar workers on the other is not apparent in the opinion polls. Indeed, the bitterness of public feeling is largely the result of the rhetoric of the leaders of both extremes. Blacks, however, did express consistently lower levels of support for the war than did the general population.
- Contrary to the widely held notion that the less educated a person is, the more easily influenced he is by the news media, the most volatile fluctuations in public opinion toward the Vietnam War occurred among the more educated segments of society.

### LESSONS

The American people have demonstrated that in spite of declining support for the war over time, they are willing to follow the president's leadership in specific crises when decisive and positive actions are taken.

A clear and certain presidential commitment to a particular foreign policy is essential to achieving public support for such policies.

Positive results are required for maintaining a high degree of popular support for US commitments to war or to contingency operations. In the absence of obvious success, American public support tends to decline gradually over time as casualties and other costs mount.

INSIGHTS

Changing  
Society

- The post-World War II years demonstrated that the American social and political systems were sufficiently flexible in meeting both domestic and foreign challenges.
- By 1968, however, the national consensus had shattered. Public dissent was expressed through urban riots and massive antiwar and antigovernment demonstrations by members of various subgroups of society.
- The US antiwar movement did not ever become a truly broad-based movement and remained identified to a degree with a radical and leftist constituency. It did give hope and encouragement to the Lao Dong leadership of the DRV, however.
- The period of the Vietnam War coincided with remarkable changes in American society, including: increasing mobility; declining family and community influence; increasing affluence for most; civil rights and civil disobedience; sexual and moral revolutions; women's liberation; education upheavals; anti-authoritarianism, etc. The Vietnam War and the dissent that arose from US involvement were not the cause of these social changes that were underway in the 1960s. The roots of these changes were extant long before the war. Yet US involvement in the war may have accelerated the spread of antigovernment sentiment.

LESSONS

Despite the apparent social upheaval of the 1960s and early 1970s, the American social and political systems proved flexible enough to adjust to that dissent.

The social fabric of the United States has changed significantly as has public appreciation of the government and the armed forces. Top-level decision makers must continue to evaluate the domestic context within which they are making decisions in crisis situations.

INSIGHTS

The Media and  
the Vietnam  
the War

- Media/government relations are adversarial by the very nature of the two institutions. Politicians look at short-term--getting past the next election or the next sticky period with Congress. Media, on the other hand, are impatient and become bored easily with unspectacular gains or long lead times for policies to become successful.
- Presidential behavior and the plausibility of presidential policies are essential to understanding media treatment--with its Washington orientation--of the Vietnam War as a whole.
- Media reporting on the Vietnam War contributed to the broadening "credibility gap" between the executive branch and the public. Too often reporters in Vietnam conveyed to the American public news that demonstrated the weaknesses of presidential policies.
- Censorship in Vietnam was determined early in the war to be infeasible. With the advances in media technology, news could be transmitted quickly out of Vietnam without relying on military communications systems. Further, the imposition of news censorship would have called more public attention to the ongoing war, which the successive administrations preferred to downplay.
- The New York Times and to a lesser extent The Washington Post are considered the "validators" of news provided by the wire services, AP and UPI. Further, these papers decide which news topics are important and thereby set a nationwide pattern. During the Vietnam War US decision makers were influenced to a great extent by the print media and specifically by these two major US papers.
- Since the "hawk" side of the debate had a diminishing number of "respectable" and vocal champions in Congress, the JCS position on what was needed "to win" rarely got aired; the debate in 1965-68 was depicted as a fight between the administration and its dovish critics.

LESSONS

Each major policy alternative must have respectable spokesmen in Washington for it to be reflected in the media, and these spokesmen must have an articulate, well-informed group in Congress, particularly if the issue is an alternative to administration policy.

News censorship is unlikely to be exercised in any future military situation in which the US is directly involved, short of a major war. Hence, it is important that military officials understand that it is the legitimate role of the media to investigate the news, including that which might embarrass a given commander.

To prevent acrimonious press-military relations during crisis situations, the military must emphasize media and public affairs education at all levels of military education.

To enable a public affairs system to function properly in the military services, every significant operation plan must include public affairs guidance, and this guidance must be transmitted swiftly to the appropriate commanders, staffs, and public affairs personnel. The latter must be carefully selected and educated and have the full support of the commander and staff. Not to provide clear public affairs guidance may lead a public affairs officer to dissemble a public impression of uncertainty concerning US foreign policy.



INSIGHTS

US Economy  
and the  
Vietnam War

- During the early and mid 1960s, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations took the strength of the US economy for granted and thus formulated substantial military programs with little reference to what turned out to be important economic limitations.
- Economic policies that were called for by the Vietnam War were not perceived to be politically viable. Either the war or the economy had to give, and with the political commitment of successive administrations "not to lose Vietnam," it was the economy that suffered.
- US presidents pursued a "guns and butter" policy in the 1960s. The long-term results were a degradation of both our national security posture and economic health.

LESSONS

Economic advisers to the president must be parties to the process for developing wartime military requirements, programs, strategies, and forecasts if they are to develop stable, realistic, and effective economic programs.

Short-term and relatively limited commitments of military force can probably be sustained and supported by the US economy without serious disruption to the civilian economy. Lacking confident predictions of the magnitude and duration of a military commitment, however, an administration should take steps early to educate both the public and the Congress of the likely economic and political consequences of a prolonged effort. In pursuing such an effort, the USG must "bite the bullet" by cutting back on other spending and by assuring an appropriate tax base.

INSIGHTS

Domestic  
Political  
Factors  
Influencing  
Vietnam War  
Decision  
Making

- Throughout the Vietnam War, each administration feared that the public would not support the president's policies if the full outline of those policies and the means employed toward their attainment became known.
- Although until 1969 Congress avoided a direct confrontation with the executive regarding the authority for war issue, many congressional leaders feared that in pursuing the Vietnam War the several presidents had broadened considerably their war-making powers, almost to the exclusion of Congress.
- Withholding from Congress of foreign policy-related information, historically, has enabled the executive branch to retain control over international relations; the Vietnam war demonstrated the need for increased cooperation and candor vis à vis Congress in foreign policy, and especially in war-related matters.
- Congressional passage of the War Powers Act and other similar legislation was a deliberate step to limit executive authority and to assert congressional prerogative in the foreign policy decision-making process.

LESSONS

Candor on the part of administration officials regarding the true nature of US foreign policies is essential to gaining the support of Congress and the public. Further, it is critical that policy makers formulate and articulate, clear, achievable, and understandable objectives and strategies.

Since a broad consensus on foreign policy ventures involving future limited wars is not likely to be forthcoming due to the heterogeneous and changing nature of Congress, the executive and Congress must develop institutional linkages such that appropriate strategies and policies can be debated and decided upon.

OVERALL LESSON

To pursue a limited war successfully, a US administration must have majority support from the Congress. Congressional support depends upon both the extent to which Congress agrees with the policies and the extent to which the president and his policies are credible. Further, the major foreign policies, especially war-related activities, must not be formulated in isolation from the development of domestic policies, since public and congressional support for the former is strongly influenced by the domestic situation. Presidential failure to consider and to mitigate the impact of foreign ventures upon the domestic environment may result in loss of credibility and the decline of public and congressional support, thereby causing the foreign policy venture to fail.

VOLUME V  
PLANNING THE WAR

## PLANNING THE WAR

Any discussion or analysis of the evolution of planning for the war in Vietnam must take into account the objectives and strategies of the principal combatants.

One of the most salient features of the Hanoi regime was its capacity to integrate and coordinate its political and military strategies during most, if not all, of the time period under consideration. Moreover, with respect to its military strategy, Hanoi appreciated the merits of flexibility, allowing for a fluid interchange between guerrilla and conventional modes of warfare in meeting its combat requirements of the moment. The DRV's dedication to the revolutionary concept of protracted struggle and its commitment to tactics aimed at creating a maximum sense of insecurity throughout the countryside were also significant aspects of the regime's strategic approach to the war. The degree of insecurity created by DRV and NLF forces was a reflection of their ability to exploit the country's geography, available logistics, and people as well as to capitalize on the weaknesses or "contradictions" inherent among their enemies.

The regime's primary objective was the reunification of Vietnam and its eventual communization. To achieve that ultimate objective, a number of secondary goals were formulated: the elimination of US presence in Vietnam, the overthrow of the government of South Vietnam, and the continued flow of aid from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union (USSR). Negotiations fit the DRV strategic scheme as a step to be undertaken only when military victory appeared certain or had already been achieved. The realities of the conflict, however, often dictated modifications in DRV strategy.

While the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was not an autonomous entity, but a creature of Hanoi's making in many respects, it did establish its "own" set of objectives and strategies. Many coincided neatly with those of the North; some underwent subtle modification or were allotted a level of priority at variance with those of Hanoi. The NLF concurred with two of the DRV's major goals: the removal of the United

States from Vietnam and the toppling of the Saigon government. The reunification of the country was also seen as an important Front goal, although the NLF program stressed a more gradual, step-by-step approach towards eventual national unification.

Consistent with their role as "indigenous insurgents," members of the NLF gave priority to the revolutionary strategy of the general uprising. This strategy was an essential component of NLF operations, ostensibly providing it with legitimacy as a revolutionary force representative of the Southern populace, and giving it a propaganda weapon necessary for attracting new converts. In the political sense, therefore, this strategy had a number of potentially potent features. Militarily, it coalesced with the DRV's desire to spawn insecurity in the South (for terrorism was an essential feature of the overall NLF program). However, its deficiencies, especially in meeting the US-ARVN high-technological capability, were obviously many.

Moscow pursued a number of far-reaching objectives in the Southeast Asian theater during the period under consideration. While the desire to support a fraternal socialist country certainly motivated Soviet involvement in the conflict, other reasons, perhaps more germane to the viability of the Soviet state, also influenced the USSR to support Hanoi. The balance of power in Asia, of increasing concern to the Kremlin as its relations with the PRC degenerated, could, from the Soviet perspective, be altered favorably by creating a strong Southeast Asian neighbor. The DRV was to serve, therefore, as the avenue for achieving this objective.

Like the Soviet Union, Communist China also had an ideological motivation for assisting Hanoi in its war effort, particularly as the nature of the Vietnam conflict reflected, to a certain degree, the protracted revolutionary struggle earlier undertaken by the Peking regime. But the Chinese involvement in Southeast Asia was also stimulated by other more complex concerns, the majority of which grew directly out of the PRC's anti-Soviet and anti-American posture.

In the early years of the struggle Peking not only viewed its support to Hanoi as a manageable risk, it also found Hanoi's military needs commensurate with the PRC capacity to fulfill them. In fact, there was a certain

coincidental compatibility between the respective supply capabilities of the USSR and the PRC: Moscow concentrated primarily on Hanoi's heavy materiel needs while Peking contributed light, primarily small-arms weaponry. Chinese refusal to coordinate a PRC-USSR united aid program for Hanoi brought into question Peking's supposed sincerity in supporting a fraternal socialist nation.

A number of significant factors influenced both the nature and type of national objectives pursued by the United States during that time period. Attitudes and perceptions gained from the Cold War, lessons supposedly learned from previous US combat experiences, the shifting nature of tri-polar politics, and, of course, the overall political and military behavior of Hanoi and DRV-NLF forces had a significant impact on the US leadership's formulation of Vietnam-related policies. The containment of communism, and hence, the preservation of a friendly, viable, non-communist South Vietnamese regime were the United States' initial and primary objectives in Southeast Asia. As the conflict intensified and as the domestic and international antiwar pressures increased, the US backed down from its earlier goals and was willing to settle for self-determination by the South Vietnamese. Finally, US strategy called for the RVNAF to take over the entire burden of combat: the objectives became the recovery of POWs and extrication of all US forces.

US plans for military operations in Southeast Asia did not take shape until the mid-1950s, and at that time were consistent with the experience of combat in Korea, with the US view of the Chinese threat to Southeast Asia, and with the unquestioned US supremacy in air and naval power.

US contingency plans for operations in Indochina, drafted during the 1950s, were remarkably similar in concept to the UN campaign in Korea. Those plans included provisions for countering a conventional enemy offensive (North Vietnamese or the combined Chinese-North Vietnamese forces), establishing defensive positions near the 17th parallel and northwest of Saigon near the RVN-Cambodia border, and mounting an eventual counter-offensive. To support those plans, provisions were made for selecting potential targets for nuclear strikes, for occupying key cities, and for

interdicting the enemy's critical lines of communication (LOCs). Those plans did not change markedly throughout the 1955-65 time period, although US planners were forced to recognize the growing importance of counter-insurgency in the early 1960s, due in great measure to President Kennedy's deep personal interest in counterinsurgency.

The actual US commitment of combat troops in Indochina in 1965 differed from that foreseen in contingency plans. Perhaps the greatest variation was in the incremental US commitment of combat troops. The gradual movement of men and equipment to Indochina had little resemblance to the intensity of commitment which US planners had envisioned during the 1950s. The early US plans had anticipated a mobilization of reserve units as a cornerstone of the US war effort. The US commitment further differed from the planned effort in that US ground troops were not dispatched to protect northern Thailand or Laos, but only to South Vietnam. Some covert special operations were carried out, as the US had planned for, but the nuclear option was not seriously considered during the course of US combat involvement. In summary, the Vietnam conflict of the 1965-73 time period was quite a different war than that which was foreseen by US planners in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Failure to mobilize during the Vietnam War caused repercussions that impacted on the US economy, the Congress and executive branch, the draft-age public, and -- to an extent that cannot yet be measured -- on the military services.

Early on in the Vietnam conflict, US military and civilian organizations failed to develop a common approach towards defeating the insurgents and pacifying the countryside. The accepted view was that there were two programs instead of one for defeating the insurgency -- pacification on the one hand, and the military effort to seek out and destroy VC forces on the other. The lack of unified direction was finally reversed when pacification was centralized under the COMUSMACV, and CORDS was established. Traditional military and civilian attitudes concerning the nature of the war and the level of bureaucratic involvement in pacification proved difficult to change until a common approach to the problem was developed



and implemented. Pacification worked. The North Vietnamese ultimately could not have won the war via insurgency, but rather they had to resort to conventional military offensives by PAVN troops. In that sense pacification did succeed, though it alone, without a strong political base, could not withstand the final DRV onslaught.

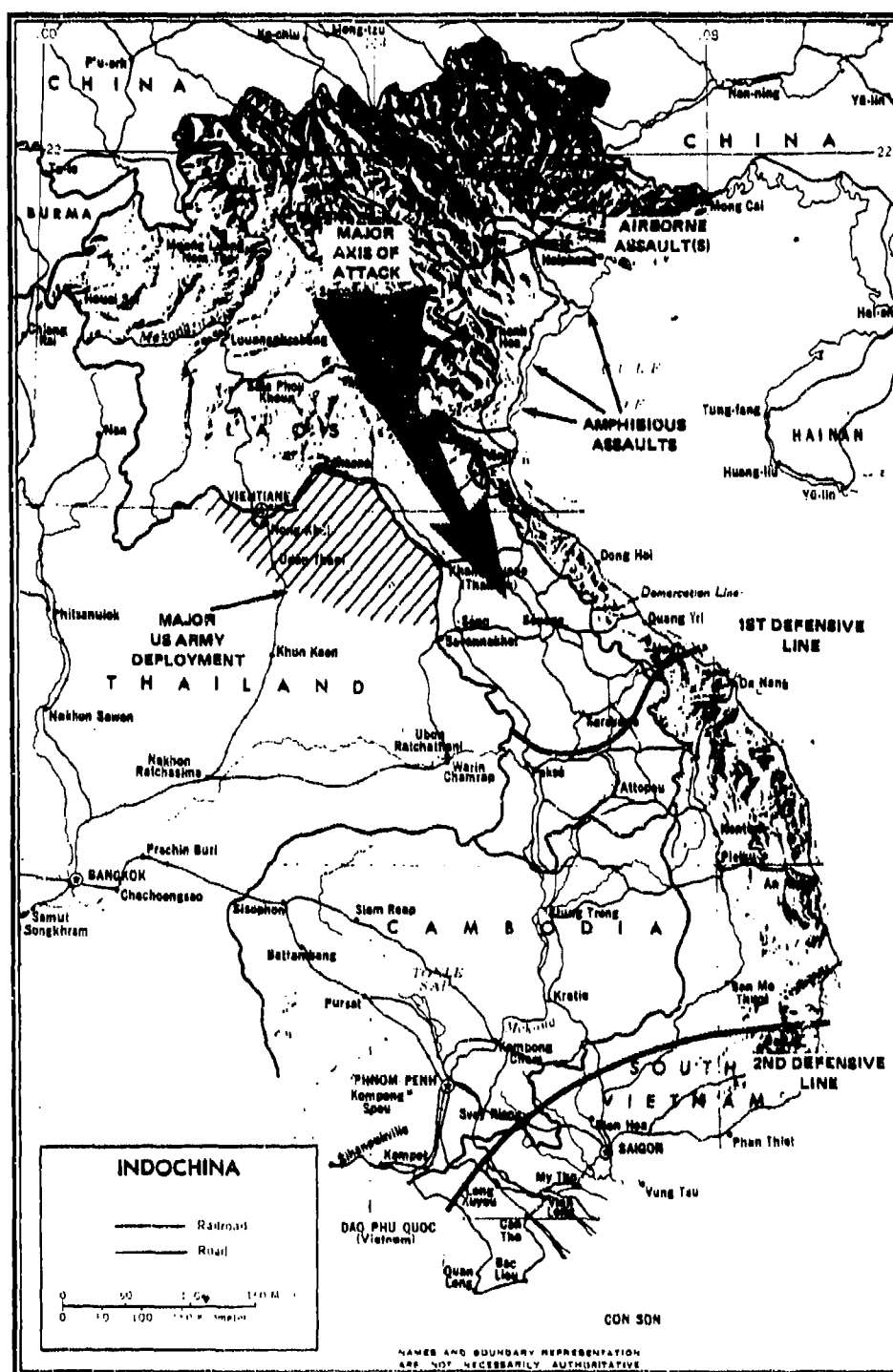
Negotiations were undertaken by the DRV only after it became apparent that the US had wearied of the inconclusive fighting. No substantive discussions took place during the waning days of the Johnson administration, and Johnson's unilateral bombing halt beginning in November 1968 eliminated one of the military pressures that might otherwise have added punch to US diplomacy.

The negotiating process favored the DRV whose leaders had a clear-cut vision of what was negotiable and what was not. They succeeded in gaining US agreement to a cease-fire in place, which gave them a critical geo-strategic advantage. They also succeeded in getting the US to withdraw all of its combat forces from Vietnam, leaving the RVNAF overextended and unsupported. DRV success in the negotiating process occurred largely because the US had changed its goals significantly and was anxious to extricate itself from Vietnam if its POWs were returned and South Vietnam was given an opportunity to survive on its own for a respectable interval.

When US withdrawal began, President Nixon set the pace, virtually without warning for the USMACV planners. He was driven by domestic pressures in this regard. Secretary of Defense Laird pressed for a rapid drawdown in the face of political realities and waning support for the war; National Security Advisor Kissinger urged a more deliberate withdrawal to assure retention of sufficient combat power to make negotiations meaningful. The US's European allies generally approved the withdrawal from RVN which signaled renewed interest by the US in NATO. The US withdrawal and subsequent failure to come to the aid of GVN/RVNAF in the face of the final 1975 enemy offensive, however, brought into question the reliability of the US as an ally. Congressional cuts in military assistance for the GVN and the inability of the Ford administration to provide at least air and naval

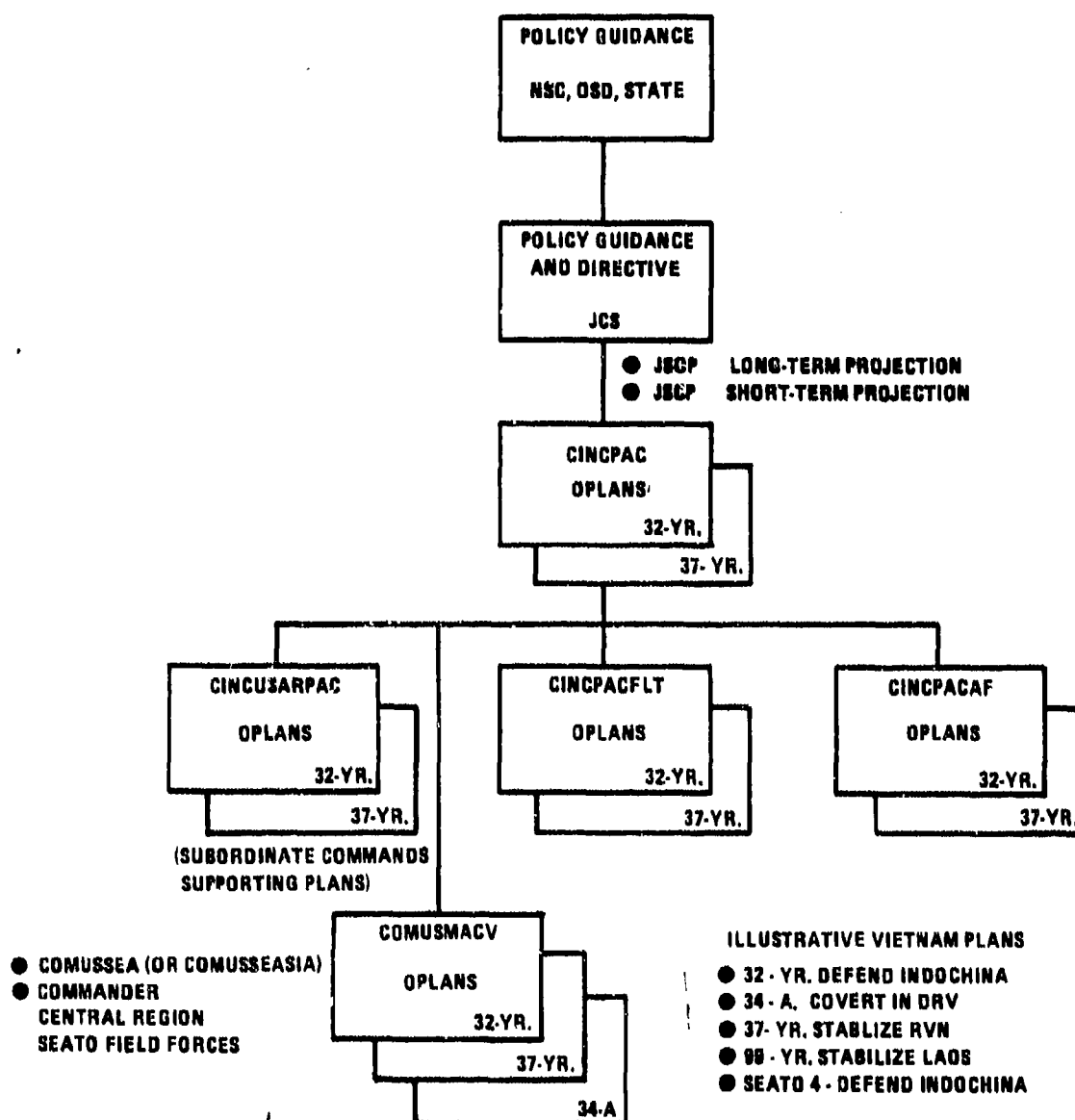
support to RVNAF in its extremis foredoomed the republic. Many ranking US officials describe the lack of US action as a betrayal of the South Vietnamese.

Map V-1 reflects early contingency planning for the defense of South Vietnam. Figure V-1 is a simplified illustration of planning relationships between PACOM, PACOM component commands, and MACV.



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Map V-1. Typical Early Contingency Planning for Defense of South Vietnam



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Figure V-1. Planning Relationships - Simplified (Illustrative)

# INSIGHTS

## Objectives and Strategies

When trying to translate broad national objectives and strategies into specific programs that can be implemented successfully in a foreign country, the US is likely to encounter problems, the nature and seriousness of which are affected by many factors. The most significant of these factors are included below:

- The maintenance of clarity and consistency in directives issued by national authorities which state national objectives and strategies.
- The willingness of, and the time available for, planners, analysts, and decision makers to assess the local situation in all its social and political complexity.
- The nature of the local situation, including its social, political, economic, and military factors.
- The environmental or external factors influencing the nature of the local situation (for example, USSR and PRC assistance to the DRV and factors associated with such alliances).
- The ability and adequacy of resources available to perform assessments, to provide realistic and honest appraisals, and to make decisions on implementation.
- The clarity and early presentation by in-country analysts and decision makers of any information relevant to national level decision-making concerning global and in-country objectives and strategies.

## LESSON

In conflicts involving the US and allied forces against other powers, inconsistencies and incoherence in US and allied objectives and strategies are likely to arise and pose problems for in-country and national level US and allied military planners. US national policy makers could greatly assist in-country planners by ensuring the maximum reasonable clarity, consistency, and specificity in any directives they transmit. The precise determination of what is maximally reasonable must be made at both the political and military levels, where explicit interpretation of national policy should occur before in-country planners are engaged. It is important that this determination be the result of prior, conscientious deliberation, rather than of default or over-rationalization as sometimes occurred during the Vietnam conflict.

INSIGHTS

US Foreign  
Policy

- The domino theory saw any conflict with the communists as a test of the US's national resolve and credibility. The Communists' gaining control over China and Cuba were viewed as Cold War defeats for the US. Each successive US president during this period found himself bound, in large measure, by his predecessor's policies.
- Throughout the entire period of US involvement in Indochina, from 1950 until 1975, the policy of containment worked and South Vietnam was not lost to communism. Each escalation was seemingly in response to the progressive escalation of the price of keeping the original commitment to help Vietnam. It was not until the "A to Z" reassessment in 1968 that there was a thorough review made of the US commitment.
- A policy of unreserved commitment to a particular leadership placed the US in a weak and manipulable position on important internal issues in Vietnam.
- The politico-military actions in the November 1963 coup against Diem would not have been possible without US connivance. To acquiesce in or to promote a coup makes sense only if positive results can reasonably be expected. The US Country Team in Saigon, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US Departments of State and Defense, and the National Security Council failed to identify a successor to Diem who might have been acceptable to the Vietnamese people as well as to the US and who might have provided effective leadership.

LESSON

As long as US policy is defined in negative terms, e.g., anticommunism or anti-Diem, it will be limited in coherence, continuity and relevance to US interests by the need to respond to situations rather than consciously to shape them. Thus despite the overwhelming power implied by "superpower" status, the United States' foreign policy will suffer humiliating defeats unless or until it is designed to exploit US strengths in pursuit of positive goals.

INSIGHTS

Contingency  
Planning

- Operation plans prepared by component commands in the Pacific Theater and their principal subordinate commands failed to appreciate and assess the true nature of the threat existing in Vietnam before 1965.
- OPLAN 32 was never implemented, although it did provide a handy "rule of thumb" concerning the US logistical buildup in Vietnam. One major reason for not implementing contingency plans as written was the wide variance between the anticipated conflict (as viewed by planners in the 1950s and early 1960s) and the insurgency-type conflict that the United States actually found. Another major reason was emphasis by the president to play down the scale of US involvement in Indochina during the 1961-1965 time period.
- Each situation requiring a contingency plan is unique and different from others which may appear at first glance to be similar.

LESSONS

Clear and definitive national security policy guidance is essential for strategic planning. Once established, national security policy with regard to any one region should be frequently subjected to scrutiny and debate to assure that policy goals are consistent with actual external conditions and with domestic political realities.

Contingency plans should not be shaped by the "last war" but by the realities of the threat and US objectives in the area of the proposed contingency.

Those who prepare contingency plans should be aware of possible domestic planning constraints and even the predispositions of top policy makers.

INSIGHTS

- Mobilization
- Failure to mobilize during the Vietnam War caused repercussions that impacted on the US economy, the Congress, the executive branch, the draft-age young men and their families, and -- to an extent that cannot yet be measured -- on the military Services.
  - Historically, mobilization connotes a sense of national determination, and therefore it provides a strong signal to an enemy; lack of mobilization conveys a sense of irresolution in circumstances such as the Vietnam War.
  - The actual US commitment of combat troops to Indochina differed from that foreseen in contingency plans. All early US plans anticipated a mobilization of Reserve Components. The failure to call up critically short technical skills, especially logistics and engineer units, contributed significantly to delays in the deployment of combat troops to Vietnam.
  - The decision not to mobilize but to depend on increased recruitment and draft calls proved to be the "lesser" of two political "evils" for President Johnson. Militarily, the decision proved less than effective, and it exacerbated Selective Service inequities, morale problems, personnel turbulence and shortages of qualified leaders and technicians. That decision, among others, contributed to his political demise.
  - The call-up of the Reserves would not significantly have altered the final outcome of the war, assuming that the war would have been prosecuted in essentially the same way that it actually unfolded. (Conversely, had the Reserve Component been mobilized at the outset, with concomitant public support, the war might have been prosecuted in more vigorous fashion and with different results).
  - The mobilization during the Korean War and the Berlin Crisis made call-ups appear to US political leaders to be politically unacceptable. The end of the Vietnam war brought with it an end to the draft and initiation of the War Powers Act. Future American presidents will be faced with a serious dilemma if confronted with a crisis situation requiring rapid buildups in military manpower.



LESSONS

"Banana" wars or other small-scale, protracted but undeclared wars are politically difficult to justify and sustain. Only a radical change in US attitudes and perceptions might enable a US president to engage in such wars in the future.

Small-scale, intense, short-term combat operations are possible, using regular forces, assuming that the forces in the proper combinations are available and ready to fight. But any commitment of appreciable size or duration will require mobilization and the full support and understanding of a majority of the American people.

INSIGHTS

Pacification  
and  
Vietnamization

Pacification

- Early GVN attempts at establishing pacification and rural development programs failed because they were little more than ill-devised blends of stop and start programs.
- During the period, the GVN failed to come to terms with the communist movement and their own fundamental political weaknesses.
- In turn, the US efforts to support GVN pacification programs were the product of:
  - reliance on conventional military methods, equipment and training
  - culturally unsuitable and impractical approaches to development
  - an inability to devise conceptually relevant programs
  - ineffective and insufficient application of leverage on the GVN.
- After 1968, the GVN, with strong US aid, turned things around, and achieved success in their pacification and development programs primarily because:
  - priority was finally given to security -- protecting and involving the people in their own defense
  - policies of land reform and economic redistribution were promoted
- The one key thing which the Thieu government failed to do during this period of pacification progress was to fashion a political community. President Thieu failed to institutionalize his government, thereby losing the gains made through pacification. Regardless, there is little doubt, having the advantage of hindsight, that pacification finally worked. The North Vietnamese ultimately could not have won the war via insurgency, but rather they had to resort to conventional military offensives by PAVN troops.

Vietnamization

- After the Tet Offensive in 1968, President Thieu and General Abrams (then COMUSMACV) threw their support behind the buildup of the territorial forces, the National Police and the attack against the VC infrastructure. And so, some ten or twelve years after the initiation of the insurgency against the RVN, there was a coordinated approach to the security phase of pacification.

- The US goal to increase the RVNAF's military forces and ability to hold off the enemy through the Vietnamization program was thwarted in the end by the RVNAF's increased dependence on continuing US military aid and technical support. Former ARVN leaders felt that their army had been organized along the wrong pattern. It had gotten a big logistics tail and it lacked the necessary equipment and mobile reserve divisions essential to counter the NVA's final assault.
- In light of the goals set by the Nixon administration (i.e., the withdrawal of US forces from RVN and to bring about a negotiated settlement of the war), Vietnamization has to be considered a success. The unfortunate aspect was that it was a decade too late.

#### LESSONS

A government calling upon the United States for assistance in maintaining power in the face of an internal threat, as did the Vietnamese government, is unlikely to be efficient or effective or to meet American ideals of democracy or probity. American commitments to assist such governments must be made with the recognition that the act of commitment and US advice cannot change the nature of the client regime or the society of the host country.

Before committing itself to supporting an ally besieged from within, the United States should be confident that it knows the composition and the motivation of the threatening forces and the problems at issue. Only through such knowledge will the US be able to assess the dimensions of the problem. Simple prudence requires that the US know in advance whether the government's cause is dubious or its prospects hopeless. The US should help, not substitute for, the government of its ally. To the extent that the US "takes charge," we postpone (and may even jeopardize) the achievement of the US's ultimate objectives. The application of this lesson in practice, as was discovered in Vietnam, is difficult and calls for a careful selection and training of advisers. If the US could turn back history, the process of "Vietnamization" probably would have been started in 1961, not 1969.

INSIGHTS

- US Withdrawal
- The president, driven by domestic considerations, set the pace of US withdrawal and announced the rate of withdrawal to MACV planners virtually without warning. This procedure left MACV too little flexibility to design withdrawal plans which would ensure that the RVNAF could successfully assume the diverse responsibilities which it was now required to fulfill.
  - MACV was forced to serve two different masters with different aims: the Secretary of Defense who pressed for accelerated withdrawal, and the National Security Adviser who needed continued US combat presence in Vietnam as a negotiating chip.

LESSON

Withdrawal plans must be designed to respond not only to US needs and considerations, but also to conditions in the host country, specifically to the host country's ability to adjust effectively to US withdrawal.

# INSIGHTS

- Negotiations
- During President Johnson's Administration, the hope for ending the war depended on being successful on the battlefield. Achieving a position of military strength became the US prerequisite for negotiations. This strategy suffered from two disabilities: (a) the nature of guerrilla warfare; and, (b) the asymmetry in the definition of what constituted acceptable losses. As a result, American/FWMAF military successes could not be translated into permanent political advantage.
  - President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger recognized that a military solution for the war was not available; therefore they set about to attain a stalemate on the battlefield, to cause the DRV to be isolated from their communist benefactors and to arrive at a political solution in the negotiations.
  - As a venture in strategic persuasion, the early bombing of North Vietnam did not work. Limited and graduated air attacks met with little success. The symbolic rationale for bombing halts backfired and the DRV used negotiations as a means to get the bombing stopped. Only when the president decided to go with a heavy bombardment of Hanoi/Haiphong in December 1972, did US airpower prove its effectiveness in getting the DRV to negotiate in earnest.
  - When negotiating a settlement on behalf of our allies and ourselves as we did in Vietnam, the US must not only be actively cognizant of their established negotiating positions, but also of their input and reactions to alternatives.
  - Early on, American leadership mistakenly believed Vietnam to be vital not for itself, but for what they thought its "loss" would mean internationally and domestically.

## LESSON

An incremental military strategy and conciliatory negotiating strategy with a communist adversary who equates restraint with weakness and with whom compromise is inconceivable will make a meaningful settlement unlikely. Furthermore, it should be remembered that communist nations do not view war and negotiations as separate processes, but consider them one and the same.

INSIGHTS

Follow-On  
Effort

- President Nixon failed to ensure or establish congressional support for his post-war military-economic aid program for the GVN, and the success of the US follow-on effort in RVN depended on the continuing ability and willingness of the US government to meet the private commitments made by the administration; public and congressional distaste for the war and, in particular, for the Thieu regime made it unlikely that the administration's program could be maintained over the long haul, a situation that was apparent at the time to many interested observers.
- While secret diplomacy has its merits, the US executive's refusal to brief congressional leadership more amply on the specifics of the negotiations, (including the executive branch's expectations regarding future US commitments to Vietnam), gave rise to South Vietnam's false security, diminished US credibility as an ally in the long run, and caused an extreme degree of confusion in both Saigon and Washington concerning the actual nature of the US commitment.
- While the US effort to enhance RVNAF in 1972-1973 did augment Saigon's hardware stockpiles for a period of time, the crash supply program had a decidedly negative impact on RVNAF morale and contributed further to the GVN reliance on the United States. Equipment deficiencies also diminished the effectiveness of American efforts to enhance South Vietnam's military capabilities.
- The divisive nature of Watergate severely constrained the US follow-on effort and further complicated Saigon's perspective on and understanding of the US desire to get on with detente (and its subsequent impatience with the Saigon leadership) and gave rise to the impression that South Vietnam was no longer of importance to the US -- merely a "sideshow" -- and, hence, further demoralized the GVN.
- The RVNAF's inability to adjust to a more austere style of fighting after the US withdrawal intensified the impact of US congressional aid cuts in military appropriations for South Vietnam at a time when the PAVN forces were completing their modernization program under Soviet tutelage. The Vietnamese propensity to "make do" and endure was shattered by its exposure to US opulence and "pour-it-on" style of combat.

LESSONS

This subtask, Follow-On Effort, is unique to the Vietnam experience and, therefore, it does not provide a suitable vehicle for developing lessons for other situations. If there are lessons in follow-on efforts, they must be these:

- Such efforts can only be successful in cases where the indigenous government has a stronger base of support than does its opposition.
- The US public and Congress must perceive the recipient nation and its leaders to be deserving of aid or it will be reduced or turned off.
- Foreign aid cannot be a substitute for efforts by the supported nation to carry its own weight -- that is, defend itself and feed its own people. The American people have historically rejected long-term aid programs.

OVERALL LESSON

There are limits to American power. Being a super power with an extensive arsenal of nuclear weapons and missiles plus a powerful modern armed force does not guarantee that a foreign policy which is designed to exploit those as well as other national strengths, such as economic and technological powers, will be successful. The limitations extend to the American Chief Executive, whose responsibilities have not diminished with regard to the formulation of US foreign policy or for the security of the US, but whose power to wage war or commit US combat forces will require the support of the American people and the Congress in the future.

Planners, be they military or civilian, must be attuned to these factors as they prepare for the contingencies of the future.



**VOLUME VI**  
**CONDUCT OF THE WAR**

**Book 1: Operational Analyses**

**Book 2: Functional Analyses**

CONDUCT OF THE WAR: OPERATIONAL ANALYSES

Early US aid and advice were seriously flawed by inadequate and/or faulty knowledge of the enemy, the allies, and the nature of the conflict. Lessons concerning French mistakes and accomplishments largely went unstudied and unheeded.

Having ignored much of the French experience, many of the initial US counterinsurgency concepts and programs were inappropriate, and that unfortunate situation was compounded by an excess of competition and an insufficiency of coordination and cooperation among US services and agencies. Having already been tainted in the eyes of their countrymen by their submissiveness to the French, senior RVNAF officers became and remained highly politicized with the overthrow of President Diem, and, with some notable exceptions, failed to provide the same quality of leadership and inspiration as did their counterparts in the PLAF and PAVN. Clearly the US aid and advice proffered during the counterinsurgency period failed, or massive US intervention would not have been necessary.

US air and ground strategies were severely self-constrained during most of the war because of unnecessary fears or unsound theories. Awkward and ineffective command and control relationships prevailed throughout the war despite the fact that the ineffectiveness of those command relationships had been pointed out frequently, and despite the fact that the enemy treated Indochina as a single theater of operations in contrast to the fragmented politico-military areas of responsibility recognized by the USG. The US strategy of attrition, with its apex at Khe Sanh, was partially the result of the self-imposed restrictions and partially because it seemed to suit the traditional US way of war. That strategy failed to achieve its objectives and played a major role in turning the US polity and their Congress against the war.

Despite the enormous and costly effort, the US and GVN were on the military, political, strategic, tactical, and especially the psychological defensive throughout the war, illustrating the difficulties facing a major coalition fighting a limited war against an opponent fighting a total war.

At several stages of the war (i.e., in 1960, 1965, 1972 and 1975), RVNAF was in the wrong posture organizationally and tactically, and inferior to the more experienced PLAF and PAVN (former Viet Minh). In all cases except for final DRV offensive, US power provided the equalizer that enabled the RVNAF to survive.

Like most democracies, the US was at a serious disadvantage trying to compete with a strong and dedicated opponent in the "fight-talk" arena. At the same time RVNAF, which had been created in part in the image of US forces, had become almost totally dependent on US ways and means of war, and without US physical support was incapable of successfully opposing the Soviet and Chinese-supported DRV alone. US failure to live up to presidential commitments was a major factor leading to the fall of RVN.

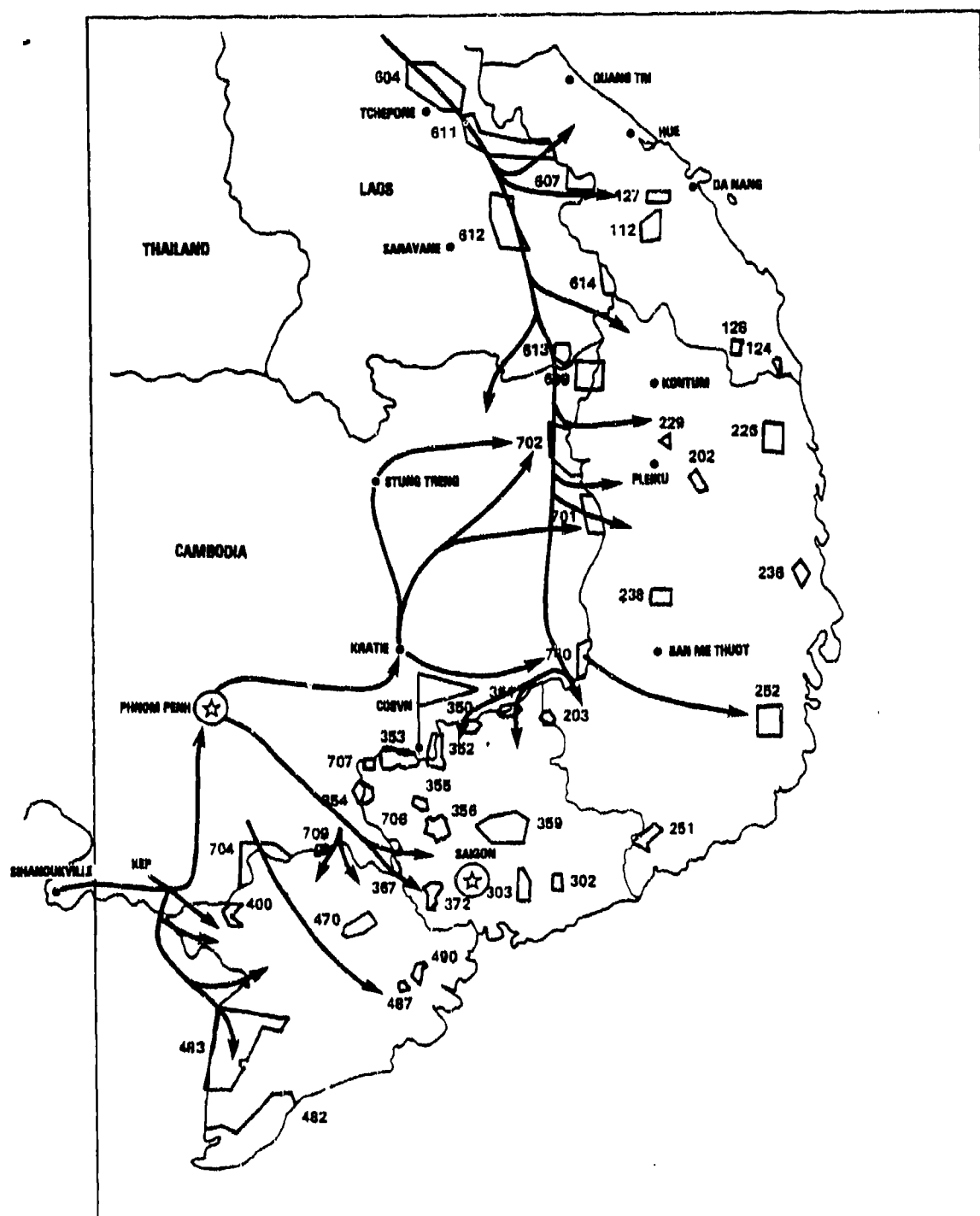
Throughout the war much of US air power was employed improperly and at great cost--human, fiscal, psychological, and political. By the time air power was applied more rationally in 1972, US political will had been sapped.

Naval operations during the war provide some interesting sidelights but contributed little that can be seen as dramatically new in the annals of naval warfare. Riverine operations did not differ materially from those conducted by the French except for a greater infusion of helicopters.

Clandestine operations were impeded from the beginning by the constraints imposed on itself by the USG. As a consequence, several highly specialized units were misemployed. The Phoenix program, which was targeted against the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI), was initiated tardily and unfortunately came in for adverse publicity, but it provided some useful insights for countering insurgency. Similarly, the US raid on Son Tay prison camp near Hanoi in 1970 furnishes an excellent example of the use of all-source intelligence and exemplary detailed planning and execution of a hazardous mission; it also provides a case study condemning the lack of such a raid capability routinely and suggests that the fixation on a high probability of success delayed execution of the mission until after the US POWs had long since been removed. Despite a number of excellent individual and small-unit efforts, US and RVNAF unconventional operations

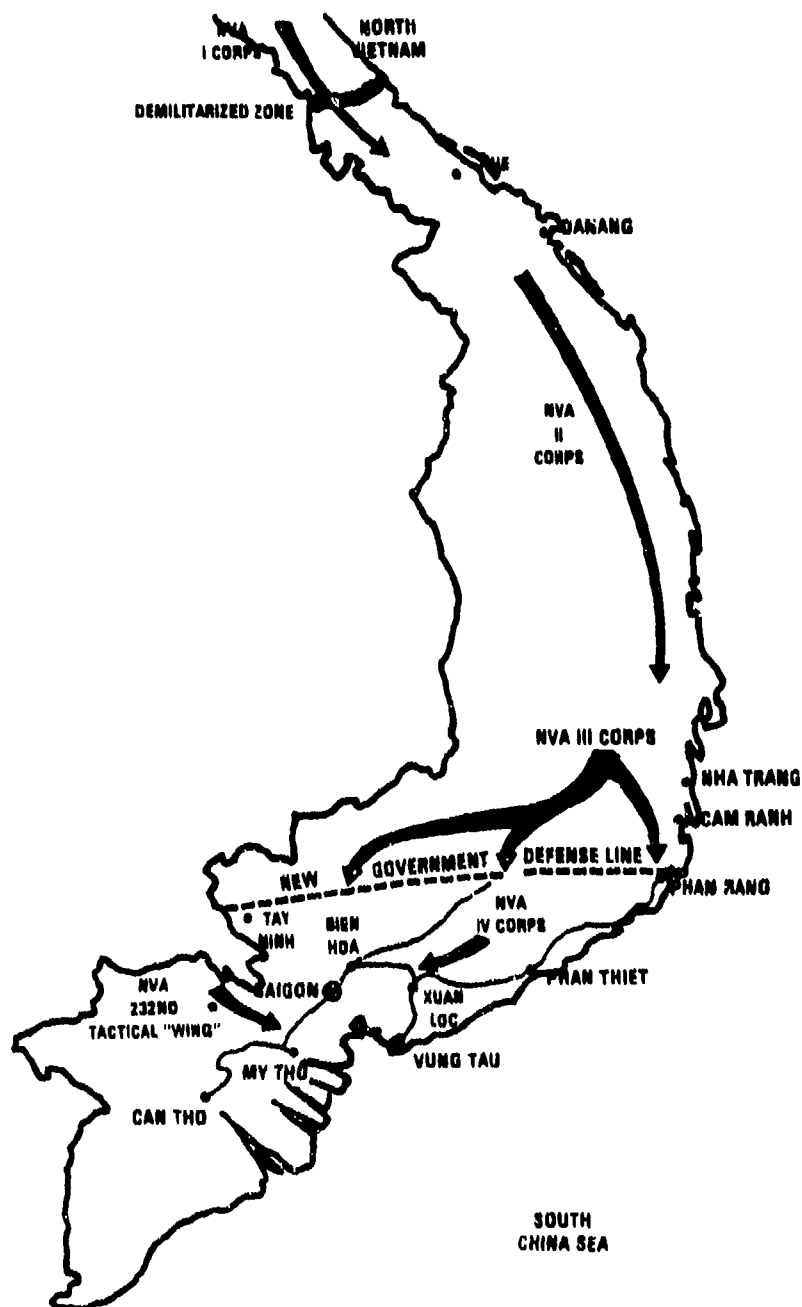
in Indochina made little notable contribution to the outcome of the war. Moreover, they raise the question of how to conduct such operations when massive forces are being used in overt operations at a time when the overthrow of the major enemy power has been ruled out publicly.

Map VI-1 shows the enemy LOCs and Base Area system as it had evolved by 1970. Map VI-2 depicts the beginning of the final assault on Saigon in 1975.



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Map VI-1. The Enemy Base Area System and Additional Lines of Communication, January 1970



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Map VI-2. The Ho Chi Minh Campaign, April 1975

### INSIGHTS

US Aid and  
Advice  
(1950-1960)

- The US learned too little, too late from the very relevant French experience (of almost a century) in Indochina; nor did we listen often and well enough to the South Vietnamese. The "costs" of not doing so are impossible to gauge correctly in retrospect, but they could not have been insignificant.
- An inaccurate assessment of the relative threats to the security of RVN - in time, scope, and nature - resulted in RVNAF being configured and prepared for the wrong "war" at the wrong time; belated efforts to train them "down" to counter the realities of the insurgency were often inappropriate and too seldom effective.
- Timely and detailed knowledge and thorough understanding of the enemy's goals, organizational structure, political-military strategies and tactics, support systems, patterns, habits, etc. would have provided the US with at least the opportunity to establish the correct priorities in helping GVN/RVNAF to meet the multiple and time-phased threats to their security.

### LESSONS

Goals, policies, strategies, force structures, and tactics which are based on inaccurate and/or untimely appreciations of the conflict environment are bound to be inferior, which significantly raises the costs, time, and chances of achieving one's objectives; nor should one's assessments be unduly biased by, or limited to, one's own experiences, perceptions, and concepts.

Decision makers - civilian and military - must listen to a spectrum of those who do have the time and ability to think, and must require their overworked staffs to do their homework. The enemy in Vietnam worked harder and better at analyzing our significant strengths and weaknesses than did we concerning his.

INSIGHTS

The Counter-insurgency Era  
(1961-1965)

- Inadequate and belated understanding of our allies and the enemy, and the complex nature of the conflict when combined with our national pride, naivete, and impatience precluded the US from developing and implementing a timely, effective, and coordinated counter-insurgency effort.
- USG agencies, in Washington and Saigon, were not organized and coordinated properly to plan and control the massive, sensitive and interwoven programs demanded by the situation in Vietnam.
- The tacit US support of the coup against Diem resulted in such political and military instability that it is doubtful if any counterinsurgency plan would have succeeded during the period.
- Generally US, and thus RVN, strategies and tactics were inferior to those of the enemy; e.g., focusing the bulk of the early efforts and resources against the enemy's replaceable regional and main forces permitted the more critical political-military infrastructure to expand rapidly in power and influence.
- The traditional but artificial separation of political and military matters made it difficult for US leaders to comprehend and counter a sophisticated "People's War."
- Despite - and partially because of - US aid and advice, the security forces of RVN were poorly prepared to cope with the insurgency, and in late 1964 were unable to stand up to the better armed and more realistically trained Main Force units.

LESSONS

It is doubtful if the US has yet learned how to defeat - in a reasonable time and at an acceptable cost - a well-organized and led "People's War"; the institutional knowledge and experience gained in Indochina have been discarded or degraded, as have been the interest and incentives.

External aid and advice, especially when based on misconceptions, cannot provide a client state with the requisite leadership, determination, and cohesion to defeat a pervasive and sophisticated insurgency.



INSIGHTS

America  
Takes Charge  
(1965-1968)

- During the twentieth century the US strategic approach had been increasingly based on materiel and technological superiority, while that of the enemy in Vietnam, due to both necessity and philosophy, was more subtle and sophisticated; the enemy's approach was more appropriate for the nature and environment of the conflict in Indochina.
- US strategy was disjointed geographically, organizationally and functionally while that of the enemy was unified and coherent.
- The American ways of life and war are very expensive and "heavy handed," and had profound and pervasive impact on the government, economy, society and armed forces of South Vietnam; all of those national elements became more or less tied to our ways without having the leadership, experience, and means to carry them through to success.
- A primary intent of both sides in the conflict, was to attrite the other for political and psychological as well as for military purposes; despite disproportionate losses, attrition was more suited to and successful for the Lao Dong leadership than it was for the US.
- Attrition took time, resources, and patience and thus led to a costly protracted war which was increasingly difficult to understand, explain and "sell" to the US news media and the public; serious study of alternative strategies came too late.
- The enemy's 1967-68 winter-spring offensives exposed his "rear base" in RVN to exploitation, ironically, that offensive crumbled the already fragile US "rear."
- The US could not afford to lose even one major battle (e.g., Khe Sanh) while the enemy could (and did) lose many, persevered, and eventually prevailed.
- The enemy's strategic deception and dispersion plan (his Phase I) was aided and abetted by his study of predictable US methods and habits; conversely, US knowledge of his approach to strategy was more superficial and subjective.
- On the whole, US military units carried out their difficult and often frustrating tasks quite well during the period. In executing the given strategy, the majority of the commanders and their staffs displayed flexibility, dedication and overall professionalism. Unfortunately, too many of the young leaders and soldiers carried out their duties with more determination and bravery than tactical skill--not their fault.

- During the Tet offensives, RVNAF gained confidence and started to "come of age"; with US aid and support they reversed the previous moral and physical ascendancy of PLAF and gradually gained at least a rough equivalence with PAVN in its contemporary state.
- The strategic dialogue between the military and civilian leaders of the USG, which was incomplete and generally mutually unsatisfactory, was brought to a head by the cumulative effects of attrition, Tet '68, Khe Sanh, the Pueblo incident, and by the untimely and poorly reasoned and presented request for 206,000 more troops.
- Despite suffering extremely heavy losses during the Tet/Khe Sanh offensives, the enemy entered the fight-talk phase in a stronger position than did the US.

#### LESSONS

Current US strategy, doctrine and tactics still are based primarily on attrition; since such an approach did not work well against a smaller and militarily weaker opponent, it should be highly suspect against a larger and in many ways stronger antagonist.

The US approach to military strategy is basically a direct and unsubtle one which is heavily biased towards the materiel and technological end of the scale and slights the psychological and political elements; a serious, comprehensive and continuing reappraisal of the bases for future US political-military strategy is overdue.

The US Way of War is extremely expensive and getting more so each year; all US services need to rethink a rational balance between high, mid and low-cost equipment and forces (e.g., for the Army the proper employment of reinforced light infantry for the defense and seizure of urban areas for light air-portable armor).

The US (like other modern western-style democracies) is ill-suited to sustain a large-scale, costly, inconclusive and protracted limited war, especially against a determined, tough and clever opponent who is capable of exploiting our internal and international vulnerabilities or contradictions.

INSIGHTS

The US Phases  
Down (1969-  
1972)

- In 1969 the combination of Vietnamization, Pacification and the withdrawal of US forces (along with greatly reduced casualties) was probably the best strategy available to the new administration that had even a chance of gaining minimum US goals in Vietnam; the people and the Congress of the US were thoroughly tired of the war, but most did not want an ignominious surrender.
- Although development of political-military strategy was concentrated at the highest levels of the USG as never before in the war, the secretive and competitive way in which it was formulated and promulgated made it very difficult for the military to execute.
- The sound military rationale for disrupting the enemy sanctuaries and LOC in Cambodia and Laos was counter-balanced by the political costs of the belated operations designed to buy time and protection for Vietnamization and US withdrawal; the incursion into Cambodia did gain some time, but Lam Son 719 was ill conceived and poorly executed and that operation visibly demonstrated serious weaknesses in RVNAF. Those strategic moves brought increased public pressure and congressional restraints on the executive.
- The RVNAF, still enmeshed in the dilemma of trying to find a correct balance between the requirements of territorial/population security and mobile warfare, was not properly prepared, psychologically or tactically, to stand up to the expanded and upgraded PAVN during the Easter offensive; without massive US advice, aid and support especially from airpower, it is likely that the RVNAF would have been severely defeated in 1972.
- The vast difference between the effects of weak and strong leadership in RVNAF was dramatically portrayed, again, during the Easter defensive; it also was made apparent how thin was GVN's base of good senior leaders.
- The sustained competition for the allocation of airpower for the tactical battles in the South (RVN) or for the larger range strategic objectives in the North (DRV) highlighted the doctrinal differences among the US services and also between MACV and the White House; the compromises arrived at permitted the achievement of the minimum aims of the various antagonists.

- By the time the "cease-fire" became effective on paper, the PAVN had improved significantly its geo-strategic position in the South, and, with the predictable diminution of US aid to the RVN, could count on the balance of power irreversibly shifting in their favor.
- "... the fatal flaw in our strategy was in failing to threaten the survival of the enemy and his system," said General Frederick Weyand, US Army (Ret).

#### LESSONS

The traditional, but largely artificial, separation between political and military ways and means in the US severely impedes the effective use of military forces in helping to gain the objectives set by the political leaders.

To achieve its optimal goals in the "fight-talk" arena against a totalitarian regime, a liberal democracy must carefully synchronize and orchestrate its politico-diplomatic-military weapons; with respect to negotiations, the application of combat power can be persuasive or counterproductive, depending upon the nature, timing, and extent of its use and the degree to which the public perceives or understands the issues at stake.

US aid and advice to an ally should be designed to support an agreed strategy that exploits the enemy's weaknesses and capitalizes on the ally's indigenous strengths.

US military aid and support should not be so foreign and specialized in given areas that withdrawal of that aid and support could leave the host country with serious gaps in those areas.

INSIGHTS

RVNAF Stands  
and Falls -  
Alone (1973-  
1975)

- The DRV was prepared for and was capable of fighting a protracted war, and recognized that the United States was not able psychologically to carry on with an inconclusive war in support of an ally that did not enjoy the respect of the US public.
- The Lao Dong Party leadership resisted all diplomatic efforts by the US to end the war until it was apparent that the primary US goals in Indochina had changed from that of having a free, viable, and independent RVN to that of recovering its POWs and extricating its forces from RVN; then the Lao Dong settled on their own terms, which included the "leopard spot" in-place cease-fire that gave them a vital geo-strategic advantage over RVNAF.
- The Lao Dong Party was unswerving in its ultimate goal to unite Vietnam and dominate all of Indochina, and all of their military actions were in support of that political goal.
- The DRV used the two-year period from January 1973 to the final drive for victory in 1975 to tie down and attrite the RVNAF, modernize their own armed forces through reequipping and retraining them, and then redeploy them strategically for the final thrust. PAVN learned to coordinate and control large combined armed-forces in mobile operations; RVNAF did not.
- After the US withdrawal, the balance of power shifted to the DRV/PAVN, and this situation was greatly exacerbated by the cut in US aid and moral support.
- Physically and psychologically the RVNAF was unprepared to fight a "poor man's war," having become reliant on US know-how and resources.
- Lacking US support, VNAF was defeated by PAVN's air defense system (supplied by the USSR and with extensive experience gained over the years in defense of the DRV and the Laotian Panhandle) and VNAF was unable to provide to RVNAF the air support needed in defense of RVN.
- Faulty planning, poor execution, and lack of intelligent leadership, especially in Military Region II, speeded the final collapse
- President Nixon made commitments to the GVN for US aid and support, implementation of which was beyond the purview of the executive branch and which depended on the will of the Congress at a time when the American public and the Congress were clearly withdrawing their support from the South Vietnamese and any further combat by US forces.

LESSONS

The American Way of War cannot be exported successfully unless it is appropriate to a given situation; it tends to make an ally dependent upon continued high levels of expensive and sophisticated American support.

The temporary support and subsequent abandonment of an ally can cost any nation its credibility as an ally or foe. Only by refraining from making commitments which it is unable or unwilling to see through to the end, and by demonstrating its willingness to go the whole distance with those allies which it does support, can a nation establish and maintain credibility as an ally.

INSIGHTS

In the Air

- There was no single air war and no single US air commander during the Second Indochina War.
- Presidential insistence on a deliberate policy of gradualism failed to threaten the DRV seriously and enabled the DRV incrementally to develop and refine one of the most effective air defense networks in the world.
- CINCPAC ran much of the air war in North Vietnam, subject to presidential license, and he did so through his component commanders CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT, whose headquarters were too far removed from the scene to function optimally.
- Air power, as used during the period 1961-1968, was not appropriate for the critical task of defeating the guerrilla infrastructure.
- Within RVN, air power was most demonstrably effective when the enemy had the initiative and was on the offensive with main force units; otherwise, the enemy kept "off the skyline," avoided heavy, direct confrontations, and relied on relatively effective active and passive defense measures.
- In this context, reliance on air power increased significantly as the US began to withdraw troops. The enemy's modernization program made him considerably more vulnerable to air attack, and air became the primary weapon.
- In Laos, US air support was a major factor in sustaining Vang Pao from the early 1960s until after US withdrawal from RVN and establishment of a coalition government in Laos.
- Public and congressional awareness of the operations in Cambodia caused further restrictions to be placed on the administration's conduct of the war. Although air support was largely instrumental in keeping Lon Nol in office, in the end it was not decisive in Cambodia because it was not used properly, mainly because of political sensitivities.
- Techniques for defeating enemy AAA and SAM defenses became highly sophisticated as the war progressed and the US gained exceptionally valuable experience in that form of warfare. So, too, did the DRV and USSR, the latter having supplied the air defense weapons, technicians, and training.

- It would appear that a substantial part of the 1965-1968 air effort in North Vietnam could have been diverted, except that no other region could have made any better use of it under the existing ground rules. Therefore, perhaps much of the air effort was not productive, some of it was counterproductive, and a lower order of air operations might have reduced the losses of airmen and aircraft without materially affecting the war within RVN.
- Except for Linebacker I and II, US air operations in North Vietnam were not sufficiently effective to warrant the losses of airmen and aircraft suffered.

#### LESSONS

Air power is used most effectively when the theater of operations is assigned to a single unified commander who is provided with a clear-cut mission and the tri-Departmental assets needed to carry out his mission. Dividing the air responsibilities among several commands not only attenuates the effectiveness of air power, but it also tends to fractionalize the intelligence structure, thereby depriving many commanders of important information.

Rules of engagement (ROE) are essential; they set necessary limits on combat commanders to assure that the fighting remains within certain prescribed bounds. Presidents of the United States can be expected to establish or review major ROE in most crises and combat situations. To influence those ROE from being overly restrictive, the military must present compelling arguments, and therefore, must thoroughly understand the political-military, socio-economic, and cultural situations. Development of and adherence to ROE are simplified in a single unified command.

Interdiction of a local area of the battlefield with air and ground fire power, supported by good all-source intelligence, can be accomplished successfully for extended periods, assuming that air superiority can be maintained and that it is a combined arms effort. Interdiction of a theater of operations in an insurgency situation is not likely to succeed unless it strikes at the external sources of support or the ports of entry, but it is likely to cost more in men and machines than the limited attrition is worth.



INSIGHTS

Blue and  
Brown Waters

- Vietnamese Army control over the Navy through the Joint General Staff led to poor utilization, minimal interest, and reduced priorities for the VNN. When US Navy units largely preempted the missions of coastal and river patrolling and river assault operations, the VNN was denied the opportunity to develop necessary capabilities. US Navy advice and assistance did not succeed in building a self-sufficient VNN.
- The US was not well prepared militarily or psychologically for the type of Naval operations that the Vietnam War demanded. The proper types and numbers of watercraft needed were not available, nor were the trained personnel or tactical procedures to cope with the counterinfiltration effort called for.
- To meet the riverine requirements, the Army designated and trained a brigade to perform with the Navy. Valuable time was lost in attaining the needed capability, but the resulting organization proved reasonably effective and performed with distinction.
- Modern US cargo vessels were not completely adaptable to cargo-handling in Vietnam. Off-loading facilities for container ships and Ro-Ro ships were not available during the early stages of the war, and supplies had to be transferred from cargo ships to lighters or landing craft for delivery to shore.
- Diversity of control of air activities, particularly between TF77 and the Air Force, presented some handicaps in aerial bombing until 1966 when adoption of a "route package" system of designating target areas greatly alleviated conflicts between Navy and Air Force flight operations. Air force officials, however, consider the Route Package system to be anachronistic -- a compromise made necessary to accommodate Navy parochialism. They prefer to see the air component commander in a position in which he (a USAF general) has operational control of all air assets -- USAF, Navy, Marine and Army.
- The use of marine mines was severely limited in Vietnam despite the recognized effectiveness of mining in restricted waterways and harbors in past wars. For political reasons, the US failed to employ mines in the major North Vietnamese ports of Haiphong, Hon Gai and Cam Pha until May, 1972. Mining of those harbors was so effective that no ocean vessels transited those ports from the placement of the mines until thirteen months later when the mines were removed by the US Navy.

- Underway replenishment (UNREP) of the fleet was more common than in the past since ships spent a great proportion of their available time underway, and ports in the immediate area of the war zone could not be used for resupply of fleet units due to limited pier space and higher shipping priorities. As a consequence UNREP was developed almost to a science.
- Amphibious operations in RVN were sometimes useful, but they introduced a host of new problems which impacted significantly on the doctrine contained in Naval Warfare Publication NWP-22B and required development of a CINCPACFLT/COMUSMACV "Agreement for US Naval Support Operations in RVN." That experience highlighted the need to evaluate amphibious doctrine in the context of new and changing situations, particularly when such operations are conducted against an elusive enemy in a friendly country in which a US ground forces commander (COMUSMACV) has already been established ashore.

#### LESSONS

In a hostile environment, when aiding and advising naval forces of a smaller and less developed country without its own naval traditions, there is a tendency for the larger nation to do the job itself and, in the long run, to deprive the smaller partner of the evolutionary process necessary to develop the technical skills and master the art inherent in naval warfare.

In concert, the US Army and Navy have developed useful tactics and techniques for riverine warfare, and that body of data should be kept current and available insofar as priorities and funding permit.

Modern Ro-Ro and Container ships and associated shore-side facilities are required for fast and secure loading and unloading in an expeditionary environment.

Air-planted marine mines are effective for interdicting inland and coastal waterways and ports, particularly when employed against an enemy who lacks a sophisticated mine-sweeping capability; retention of this capability requires that the Navy personnel system have the means to identify regular and reserve aviators who have demonstrated skill in sowing minefields during actual operations.

INSIGHTS

## Unconventional Warfare ●

- The US government's publicly announced policy that it did not seek to overthrow the government of the DRV severely limited the unconventional warfare options available to military planners and rendered ineffective much of UW activity that did take place.
- The US and GVN had not used the decade after the 1954 Geneva Agreement to build and nurture an effective network of agents in the North, therefore, there was no friendly base to support covert or clandestine operations within the DRV.
- During hostilities there did not appear to be any attempt to exploit the Catholic population or any of the mountain tribes that remained in North Vietnam but which might have been sympathetic to efforts to topple the Lao Dong Party leadership.
- COMUSMACV did not have the status of a wartime theater commander; therefore, he had no control over the CIA, and UW operations had to be cleared at national level.
- Despite the formation of what purported to be a joint unconventional warfare task force (JUWTF) known by its cover name of the Studies and Observations Group (SOG), unconventional operations were not centralized at MACV or PACOM level. Instead, the CIA, SOG, 5th Special Forces Group (Abn), PRU with US advisors, Air Force SOS, and others conducted special operations, often subject to the approval and control of the cognizant US ambassador.
- US-sponsored PSYOP did not offer enemy populations any viable alternatives that were within their power to choose, largely because of US policies toward the DRV.
- US Special Forces participation under CIA direction in the CIDG program provides a good example of population denial, but when that program was transferred to the military under Operation Switchback, the program was militarized and lost much of its potential political impact.
- The Son Tay raid demonstrated that US special operations could be executed successfully in the enemy's rear, but the public outcry in the US over the perceived failure of that operation militated against similar operations thereafter. Emboldened by the accelerating US withdrawal after 1969, the DRV had put the bulk of its fighting forces in Laos and RVN, leaving its rear quite vulnerable, but that situation was never exploited by US or RVNAF special operations forces.

- Cross-border operations in Laos and Cambodia, directed against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, were generally very constrained but nevertheless proved to be productive in gaining information on the enemy supply system and personnel movements. Casualties were inflicted and some supplies were destroyed by the special operations forces directly or through the gunship or fixed-wing air support they had available. For political reasons, those operations were not expanded and full advantage was not taken of the US/RVNAF capabilities for ground force interdiction of the trail.

#### LESSONS

Unconventional warfare operations can be optimally effective only when certain principles are followed:

- There must be a coherent national policy which permits the implementation of UW to the best advantage of the US.
- The policy and planning for UW operations should be centrally controlled, but execution of field operations should be decentralized for flexibility and secrecy.
- The required dedicated assets should be provided to facilitate rapid action/reaction by special operations forces and to minimize reliance on external agencies.

The enemy's rear is usually vulnerable to some kind of special operation on the ground, and ground force penetration of the rear, even in small-scale hit-and-run raids has a nuisance value that creates morale and psychological problems for the enemy leadership as well as inducing him to commit more military forces to the defense of his rear (as opposed to merely emplacing antiaircraft installations to defend against air raids, for example).

When paramilitary operations are made the responsibility of a military commander, it is imperative that he be given the same command relationship with the CIA assets in his area as would exist in a wartime situation and as prescribed in the Command Relationships Agreement (CRA).

CONDUCT OF THE WAR: FUNCTIONAL ANALYSES

Lack of an all-source intelligence capability in-country caused the intelligence effort to be substantially less effective than it otherwise could have been; the services failed to share much of their intelligence data with other US components until nearly the end of the war.

After its initial gross inadequacies, resulting mainly from the failure to mobilize reserve components, the US logistical system was enormously effective in meeting the exorbitant requirements levied on it; the system was not efficient, however, and proved to be exceptionally wasteful and undisciplined while at the same time failing to meet the needs of RVNAF after the US withdrawal.

Lack of appropriate command and control mechanisms seriously eroded the efficiency of combat operations and contributed to the anomaly of several separate and apparently unrelated wars.

US advisors appear to have been effective when advising in purely technical military matters, such as weapons instruction, but they were neither trained nor indoctrinated properly for advising the RVNAF in the politico-military environment which characterized Vietnam.

The stereotyped US psychological operations in RVN appear to have achieved no particular successes, whereas the enemy, whether by luck or intent, achieved several impressive psychological victories.

Early civil affairs activities were generally ineffective; CORDS was very successful after 1967, and had the US not reneged on the president's promise to intervene if the DRV violated the cease-fire, CORDS offered considerable promise of success.

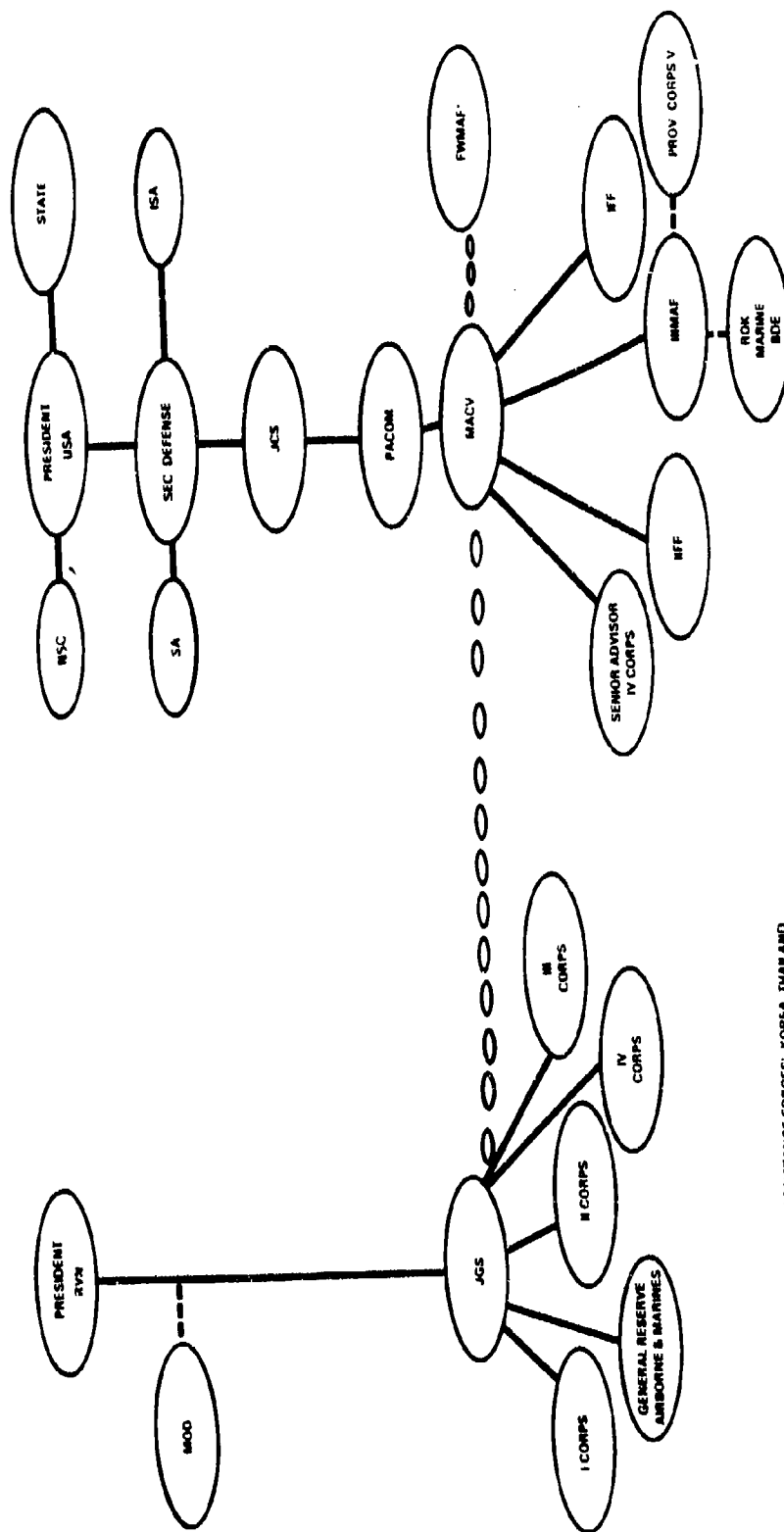
Statistics provide a reasonable basis for making strategic and tactical decisions when those statistics are used intelligently; in Indochina the body count, tonnages of bombs dropped, numbers of artillery rounds fired, numbers of sorties launched, unit days in the field, numbers of patrols dispatched, etc., were important statistics for promotion and decorations. However, in no way did they measure progress towards the achievement of US goals.

The evolutionary process for the development of several weapon systems was accelerated because of the war in Vietnam, and important developments took place in airmobile tactics, techniques, and equipment as well as in electronics and ordnance; several technological developments made it possible to launch devastating attacks against the enemy's heartland in the face of an extremely sophisticated air defense system while suffering a relatively low level of casualties. In this sense technology helped in the prosecution of the war and has provided, at least temporarily, an advantage for the US over the USSR with respect to air-delivered ordnance.

Except for the Australian and New Zealand forces, the allies in RVN were solicited and paid for by the US in what proved to be an unsuccessful effort to create an image of multilateral concern for the GVN. ROK forces were feared by the South Vietnamese civilians, and their major contribution was the occupation of a substantial amount of territory; Thai forces were not combat effective and might better have been used at home. The Vietnam War can be viewed as a strong case against ad hoc coalition warfare.

See Figure VI-1 which depicts command relationships for the ground war in ARVN, March 1968.

# THE BDM CORPORATION



\*FWMMAF (FREE WORLD MILITARY ASSISTANCE FORCES) KOREA, THAILAND, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, PHILIPPINES, ETC

ooo COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

=== OPERATIONAL CONTROL

4541/78W

Figure VI-1. Ground War in RVN, March 1968

INSIGHTS

- Intelligence
- Among senior officers and within the intelligence community, there appears to have been a lamentable lack of familiarity with the enemy's doctrine, organization, strategy, and tactics coupled with a related failure by most to read and understand the writings of Mao, Ho, Giap, and others, or to try to learn from the French experience against the same enemy. Those who did understand the enemy apparently were unable to articulate their concern or knowledge at high levels within DOD and the administration. Had a better understanding of the enemy's modus operandi existed, the VCI would have been an early priority intelligence target. Since the infrastructure was not targeted early enough, it was able to become entrenched and to foment insurgency with marked efficiency.
  - Excessive reliance on SIGINT by the US and ARVN made them susceptible to communications deception; ARVN's poor OPSEC/COMSEC often alerted the enemy and resulted in heavy casualties and tactical failure -- such as in LAM SON 719 (1971). US COMSEC was also generally very poor.
  - NSA's insistence on conducting SIGINT analysis in CONUS often delayed the availability of important data beyond the point where it would have been useful. Further, analysts in CONUS could not be expected to know and appreciate the tactical commanders' requirements nor could they have access to local collateral information that would help in the analytical process.
  - The US and GVN failed to provide for or use effectively skilled stay-behind agents in and after 1954. This type of operation requires early planning, training, and indoctrination plus careful preparation. Conversely, the DRV anticipated, planned for, and implemented an effective stay-behind program which, in the early 1960s, nearly toppled the GVN and which provided valuable HUMINT and other services throughout the war.
  - US and GVN intelligence apparatus focused too much on main force units and not enough on the VCI and local guerrillas until very late in the game. Further, the focus on enemy "capabilities", not balanced by analysis of his "intentions", helped to lead to such major surprises as Tet '68, Lamsom 719 (1971), the Easter offensive (1972), and the Final Offensive (1975).
  - With some exceptions, order of battle intelligence on PLAF and PAVN main force units was good to excellent throughout US involvement in the war; as a result the enemy was generally unable to mass and seriously threaten large US units.



- Despite the many positive aspects of US intelligence operations in Indochina (SIGINT, PHOTINT, HUMINT acquisition and analysis), there is need for a more cohesive effort between intelligence personnel, commanders, and policy makers, and between the Service components and intelligence establishments.

#### LESSONS

To support an in-theater intelligence effort, an all-source intelligence center, including SIGINT, should be established under the theater commander (unified, sub-unified or combined) in country or nearby to fuse the collected information. Analysts at this center would require access to the same highly sensitive information which the senior intelligence analysts in Washington would have.

Unit commanders and their staffs at brigade and possibly battalion level should be cleared for SIGINT and should receive direct SIGINT support during combat operations to optimize tactical operations and fully exploit all-source intelligence.

If the intelligence effort is to succeed in the first critical period of a crisis, there must exist a sufficient body of trained intelligence personnel in all specialties of the intelligence field, and personnel activities must have the capability of identifying and assigning to appropriate headquarters, field organizations, and combat units the requisite intelligence specialists.

Insurgents operating in territory familiar to them will succumb to regular forces only if the regulars know and understand their insurgent enemy and then fully exploit their own mobility, firepower, communications, and other modern advantages without counterproductive fallout among any indigenous populace. That requires good intelligence.

INSIGHTS

Logistics

The following factors generated unexpected logistical problems:

- US combat forces were committed without the lead time needed for normal or special logistic preparations.
- US military power was applied incrementally with continual changes in logistic requirements, providing little opportunity for coherent long-range planning.
- Reserve forces and civilian industry were not mobilized despite the magnitude of the conflict, making it necessary to rely heavily and excessively on civilian contractors.
- Pre-hostilities logistic contingency planning within PACOM and its component commands failed to provide for the proper balance between operational concepts and logistic capabilities.
- The base development program executed in Vietnam was unnecessarily costly due to the philosophy of importing into the combat environment a US peacetime living standard for the committed forces.
- Rapid escalation of the construction program resulted in loss of effective management control of contractor efforts, both by prime contractors and government contracting agencies, resulting in the procurement of unneeded supplies, equipment, and services. Government costs increased substantially and great quantities of supplies and materiel were lost due to inadequate storage facilities, physical security, and inventory controls.
- Lack of supply discipline and of confidence in the supply system added to the problem of large excesses of equipment and materials.
- The Vietnam War was fought under peacetime statutory and regulatory limitations that were inapplicable to the situation.
- The rapid buildup in RVN without mobilizing the Reserve Component made it necessary to draw on materiel and equipment in or scheduled for the Reserves to outfit Regular units deploying to RVN. The inadequacy of War Reserve Material and Supplies (WRMS) was underscored by the Vietnam War.
- Many government-owned production facilities were obsolete and lacked funds for adequate maintenance and rehabilitation.
- The retrograde of forces and materiel from the combat zone (1969-1972) was done while under fire with continuing high priority support of the in-country forces. It constitutes a unique and remarkably effective effort.

### LESSONS

In future conflicts, US construction efforts should be a responsibility of the theater command to facilitate planning, contracting and construction execution. The Army should have the primary responsibility for construction, although the need for augmentation by construction units from other Services must be anticipated and planned for.

- Severe constraints must be imposed upon the construction effort, and only operationally needed facilities should be constructed.
- Procedures must be developed to provide effective management controls over construction contract efforts, particularly those of the magnitude of the RVN joint venture contract.
- Overseas major supply bases are required for the storage of pre-positioned, long-lead-time construction material and supplies to increase responsiveness. Major overseas depots should also serve as major supply points for consumable construction material which will be shipped forward on "as required" basis.

A closed-loop, centrally controlled, overhaul maintenance system utilizing both theater and CONUS facilities is essential for peacetime and wartime maintenance. Additionally, provisions for using such a closed-loop program must be included in mobilization and contingency plans. It should be noted that the effectiveness of a closed-loop system depends on the availability of serviceable assets and the timely retrograde of unserviceables to the maintenance centers.

The current Army active duty structure fails to provide for adequate flexibility in meeting facility-engineering force requirements for contingency operations in less than a total mobilization.

Failure to practice supply discipline and fiscal restraint in the early phases of a buildup, in the field and at unified command and Service Headquarters Level, will contribute materially to serious logistical and fiscal problems and inexcusable waste.

INSIGHTS

Command,  
Control, and  
Cooperation

There is a great deal to learn from analyses of the arrangements employed to plan and control the US and allied war effort in Indochina, but there is little to emulate.

The four main elements of the US strategy for the conflict (i.e., preparing GVN & RVNAF to stand on their own, defeating the enemy's strategy on the ground within RVN, the punitive air war over the DRV, and the quest for meaningful negotiations), for the most part, were separately conceived and controlled and at times largely unrelated.

The United States adopted a system of command and control which it recognized as inherently flawed. The reasons for selecting such a system were many and varied, they included: the sensitivity and vulnerability of the GVN and RVNAF to the charge of being US puppets; the USG's concept of limited war for limited aims; the desire of the White House to keep tight control over the air war in the North; the reluctance of the JCS to infringe on the prerogatives of the theater and field commanders and interagency and interservice rivalries. Although each exception to the principle of unity of command could be rationalized, the end result was considerable wasted resources and unnecessary delays and frictions. Whether the political/psychological damage of unified command would have been a greater negative is hard, if not impossible, to determine.

- Neither the US nor the GVN ever satisfactorily resolved the command and control problems inherent in the concurrent and conflicting demands of territorial/population security and those of big unit mobile warfare.
- The RVNAF command and control procedures and practices, while generally suitable for small scale relatively static combat, for the most part were hopelessly inadequate for large scale mobile war.
- Dividing the conduct of the war between PACOM and MACV was unsound, wasteful and often counterproductive. The situation would have been much worse if the senior commanders and their staffs had not worked hard to "cooperate and coordinate."
- The centralized control of airpower in a theater of operations, outside of NATO, apparently is still a sensitive and unresolved issue.
- Short of the President, no single official or agency had the responsibility and authority to coordinate and supervise, on a daily basis, the heterogeneous USG bureaucracy involved in the complex political-military conflict in Southeast Asia.

- While loyally supporting the field commanders, the JCS failed to provide adequate and timely guidance and meaningful supervision. Conversely, they apparently failed to translate and present convincingly military imperatives to their civilian chiefs. (Those remain as unresolved dilemmas.)

#### LESSONS

Unity of command (effort) remains as one of the cardinal principles of war across the entire spectrum of conflict.

In countering a Revolutionary (people's) War unity of effort is absolutely essential; that unity must include not only the indigenous inter/intragovernmental agencies but also those of any allies involved. Selection of the person, office, and nation to be placed in overall charge of the combat efforts will require insightful, sensitive analysis and objective, courageous decisions.

Coalition warfare - a basic tenet of US strategic policy - inherently is extremely difficult to coordinate and control; expedient compromises may suffice during periods of low to mid-intensity conflict, but inevitably will result in grievous fractures under heavy political-military pressure.

Despite the hard-earned "lessons" of World War II, Korea and Vietnam, the USG, and especially the military, have not resolved satisfactorily joint warfare doctrine, especially with regard to control of air power.

The costly lessons learned from the command and control shortcomings in Southeast Asia have potential value for both political and military leaders and planners; in varying degrees they are applicable to preparing for any future conflict, be it in the Third World or in Western Europe.

The JCS and Services must search for and agree to realistic doctrine and techniques for providing necessary military guidance, supervision and support to the field commanders; otherwise, in a future crisis, the military is likely to lose yet more influence and control.

INSIGHTS

The Advisory  
Effort:

- The initial US advisory effort in RVN (1956-1965) succeeded in developing a regular Army (ARVN) of limited competence in conventional warfare, an Army that required US combat support to operate with any appreciable efficiency against PLAF (VC) main force units; the ARVN was neither trained nor motivated to target and operate against the communist infrastructure (VCI) which constituted the principal actual threat through 1964.
- For whatever reason, lack of funding or lack of sufficient trainable manpower, the police forces in RVN were not trained or equipped by USOM to operate effectively against the guerrilla forces in South Vietnam; coupled with a similar failing in the military this deficiency on the part of the USG/GVN contributed significantly to the communists' ability to entrench themselves and expand their influence and control throughout the republic.
- In general, US advisors to RVN were not selected on the basis of language skills or ability to deal effectively with Asian counterparts, but rather on the basis of military occupational specialty and availability for and vulnerability to an overseas hardship tour.
- Military personnel were posted in large numbers to advisory billets in which civilians would have been more appropriate; this situation stemmed from a lack of sufficient numbers of civilians with the proper skills who were willing to serve in a combat zone, balanced by the ready availability of military personnel and the procedures for identifying and tasking them.
- In the period of major US involvement (1965-1970), US advisors assigned to RVNAF units provided a useful liaison function although the quality of their advice varied; advisors in the CORDS, beginning in 1967, contributed significantly to the early development of pacification and, subsequently, Vietnamization.
- Among the disadvantages that accrued to the US advisors were the general lack of language training and thorough indoctrination before reporting; the lack of careful selection to weed out those who may have been ill-suited for advisory duties on either a professional or personal basis; the short one-year tours which, when orientation and R and R time were subtracted, provided less than a year to acquire the wide variety of combat-associated experiences needed, to know and understand their counterparts, and to gain the cooperation needed to do the job.

- Advisors often faced a difficult problem in trying to report honestly and accurately: RVNAF counterparts could be embarrassed and lose face in many instances; in other cases, senior US officials insisted on favorable reports and discouraged accurate reporting.

#### LESSONS

The US military services have demonstrated their professional excellence in training foreign personnel and units in technical skills; they have not performed well in advising in politico-military matters because of their lack of background, training, education, and competence.

Future advisory efforts should rely on a cadre of highly trained specialists rather than a massive effort by amateurs; those specialists should be familiar with the history, culture, and government of the country in which they serve and they should be fluent in the indigenous language and well trained in advisory techniques. Further, the tour of duty for advisors should be of sufficient duration to be effective and to assure continuity.

INSIGHTS

Psycho-  
logical  
Operations

- Much was learned as a result of the massive US PSYOP effort in RVN, but the lessons may be difficult to apply in a democratic society: Americans generally believe in separating military matters from politics, and they endorse an open society with close public scrutiny of all government actions. These mind sets create a difficult climate for PSYOP in contrast with the subtle and patient communist enemy in Indochina.
- A government faced with a growing insurgency has already lost touch with its people; it has failed to communicate with them or to develop programs to satisfy their needs. If it is to survive, that government must respond to the legitimate needs of its people and make the necessary political, social, and economic changes while attenuating the hard-core opposition either psychologically or militarily.
- PSYOP conducted by the US/GVN were more mechanical than psychological, being driven and measured by statistics, such as numbers of leaflets deployed and numbers of broadcasts made.
- The GVN faced nearly insuperable odds in trying to conduct PSYOP effectively, having had the issues of nationalism and anticolonialism co-opted by the Viet Minh and then the DRV at the outset; from about 1960 to 1963 the steady erosion of the GVN's image made it difficult to employ PSYOP (while losing), and the series of chaotic changes in government after Diem's murder made it impossible to conduct a coordinated or coherent effort. BG S.L.A. Marshall commented on that period in these terms, "I judged that our psychological operations were, as usual, only a few degrees above zero."
- US PSYOP efforts internationally were not successful, having failed to explain the US position in a sympathetic light or to unmask the enemy, thereby failing to elicit the support of many allies and failing to blunt the criticism emanating from communist countries and the third world.
- US/GVN PSYOP failed to exploit the more prominent communist excesses such as occurred at Hue in 1968 or the slaughter of refugees in the 1972 Easter offensive, yet suffered PSYOP reverses at the hands of the US and international media over the 1968 Tet Offensive and My Lai.



- The organization of JUSPAO was a major step in Vietnam in developing functional integrity for PSYOP, but it was fractured by indifference, bureaucratic rivalry and differing conceptions of propaganda and policy; the military establishment never took PSYOP very seriously, and its officers in the field believed that anyone, themselves included, could write leaflets.
- The American PSYOP effort, to be effective, had to be a derivative, not a primary effort; it could advise, exhort, teach, fund and equip the South Vietnamese who were conducting PSYOP, but it could not substitute for them.

#### LESSONS

The indigenous government must develop policies and programs which reduce the grievances and meet the aspirations of its people. The psyoperators who participate in the policy-making process must also participate in the communicating process.

The psychological operations messages must be consistent and adhere to reality; the government policies and programs described must actually exist and must be vigorously pursued by the government.

An assisting power cannot substitute for the host government in communicating with its people.

To be fully effective, PSYOP must be conducted face-to-face by trained PSYOP personnel.

The American way of war, which involves massive use of firepower, much of it unobserved, is often counter-productive with respect to PSYOP in a counterinsurgency environment. "The significance of the reliance on psychological warfare to replace firepower in counterinsurgency is that it reduces the need for combat operations, thus minimizing the destruction of life and property which so often impacts upon the population. It is also much cheaper, a factor not to be ignored."

INSIGHTSCivil  
Affairs

- Military civic action had its uses, but there was a tendency for the US to provide things to the Vietnamese as a substitute for communicating ideas to them.
- American governmental agencies involved with pacification and civil affairs programs tended to continue to support and justify those programs, good or bad, which they themselves had helped initiate or in which they had a parochial interest in perpetuating.
- The establishment of CORDS in 1967 provided a single focus of authority, responsibility, and centralized management in Washington and in the field; CORDS is a useful model for future civic action situations.
- The US Marine leadership found that military civic action--dealing directly with the Vietnamese people on a small scale person-to-person basis--was a successful way of winning peasant support and defeating the insurgents locally, but unfortunately the GVN leadership, as well as ARVN and provincial officials, did not support fully the Marine Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program. The peasants tended to develop a loyalty to US Marines instead of to their own military or government officials, and though locally successful, Marine CAP and other MILCAP programs failed to help the GVN win the political support necessary for survival as a viable political entity.
- Civil affairs functions have limited application except in war, so it is inevitable that in peacetime the active forces will at best have a minimal capability for conducting civil affairs; the Reserve Components can and should maintain and keep current a significant civil affairs capability. When committed in a combat environment, civil affairs specialists should be assigned for periods of sufficient duration for them to be effective rather than for the limited one-year tour that prevailed in RVN.
- One of the greatest weaknesses in RVN was the absence of an institutional structure of government, and neither US nor GVN leaders learned how to create that structure; President Thieu failed to build an organic, widely based institution of government in the favorable period after Tet 1968, and that, in part, was a failure of civil affairs.
- The people of South Vietnam did not rally to support the NLF or the DRV: not in 1963 when President Diem was killed, not in 1968 during the communist Tet offensive, not during the Easter offensive in 1972, and not even in 1975 when PAVN forces were obviously about to win a final victory. Pacification was working.

LESSONS

In a counterinsurgency situation, successful civil affairs operations frequently have more lasting importance than winning conventional battles. Successful civil affairs programs are those that win the support of the population for the national leadership which is essential in a counterinsurgency war. Civil affairs programs demonstrate the interest of the national leadership in the welfare of the people by providing security and improvements in the standard of living of the local population. In a counterinsurgency situation, it should be recognized that military operations should support civil affairs objectives. Therefore, one of the obvious requirements in any counterinsurgency situation should be the appropriate training in and importance of civil affairs, both for unit commanders and civil affairs specialists.

A policy of limited tours of duty for military personnel reduces the effectiveness of both military and pacification efforts, disrupts organizational cohesiveness, fails to capitalize on hard-won expertise, and requires immense financial and personnel expenditures.

A successful civil affairs effort requires a single focus of authority and responsibility -- centralized management -- both in Washington and in the field.

Civil affairs programs must involve the support of the host-country national leadership as well as local officials and the general population in order to achieve national solidarity and political stability of the host government.

INSIGHTSMeasures of  
Progress, or  
Keeping Score

- The most pernicious measure of progress in Vietnam was the body count, not because casualty statistics are of themselves wrong or distasteful but because of the use made of the statistics. The perception of success in a given engagement in the Vietnam War usually derived from the body count, later augmented by the captured weapons count. Officers' efficiency reports and the allocation of combat support assets were strongly influenced in many organizations by relative standings in racking up a high body count. The often warped interest in body count provided an inducement for countless tactical unit commanders to strive for a big kill (whether legitimate or feigned) in preference to providing security for a hamlet or village.
- In many cases the statistics used as measures of progress in Indochina were very misleading and had no bearing whatever on actual progress; for example:
  - Unit days in the field and numbers of patrols dispatched became ends in themselves and as important as results achieved.
  - The enormous tonnages of bombs dropped became goals to be equalled or exceeded, yet about 75% of the aircraft sorties flown were not closely linked to ground combat but rather to the interdiction effort which, itself, generated questionable statistics.
  - The preponderance of artillery fires (except for Tet '68 and other major engagements) were unobserved fires, adding to the "rounds expended" statistics and often increasing the number of disaffected or refugee South Vietnamese.
- "Killed by Air" (KBA) statistics were particularly inaccurate and they became subject to frequent challenge by the media to the degree that CG 7th Air Force General Momyer stopped their use.
- So much unnecessary data were collected that manual and computer systems were nearly swamped, and much of the effort was self-generated by higher military commands, including the JCS in the search for useful measures.
- The Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) initiated in 1967 replaced the biased, inaccurate, exaggerated, and often self-serving Joint GVN-US reporting system; HES contained some inaccuracies, but the US advisors had the final word, and higher echelons could not make changes in the advisors' evaluation of hamlet security. As a consequence, the HES system provided very good data on trends and was generally considered to have been the most effective system that could have been implemented.

### LESSONS

In warfare, comparative statistics play an important role in the planning, conduct, and analysis of battles. Those statistics are a valid and necessary tool, but the criteria for measurement must be meaningful, the reporting system must be inspected, supervised and disciplined, and the statistics must not be permitted to become ends in themselves. Casualty statistics, unfortunately known as body count in Vietnam, will continue to be an important analytical device, but care should be exercised in how and where these statistics are presented.

In any future conflict situation, regardless of the intensity, and/or scope, US leaders and commanders at all levels will continue to have a need to know the status of progress being made by their forces in combat. Furthermore, the advent of scientific management techniques and increased use of computers in data collection and analysis by the DOD will make quantitative analysis of that data a matter of course. Therefore, it is incumbent on the US military establishment to analyze the full spectrum of possible conflict situations to determine in advance the measures of progress which would be most useful to future decision makers.

Civilian leaders and military commanders should remember that combat data collection, compilation, and analysis need to be properly interpreted, balanced by professional experience and judgment, and properly employed in the evaluation and crafting of policies and strategies. A failure in any of those areas would make even the best data of marginal value, and prevent the necessary blending of art and science.

INSIGHTS

Operational  
Techno-  
logical  
Innovations

- Most operational innovations were the result of the and application of human ingenuity in the field, proposed and recommended or constructed by soldiers in the ranks rather than by filtering down from a research agency or senior command level.
- Militating against the countrywide implementation of a practical innovation was the lack of sufficient cross-fertilization of good ideas or lessons learned. Army lessons learned were passed through the chain of command to USARV where they were staffed and then sent to CONUS. Some of the lessons learned were published in USARV media, but, for the most part, a good idea or innovation devised in a US unit in the Delta seldom reached the ears of the soldier in I Corps to the north.
- The 12-month tour also mitigated the spread of lessons learned because newly arrived personnel were usually not aware of what had proved disastrous or feasible in the past. Institutional memory was also degraded by the six-month command tour.
- Several useful technological developments resulted from the extensive R&D effort pursued during the Vietnam War, including:
  - In aerial combat: improvements in the air-to-air missiles and development of effective air-to-air tactics which materially altered the kill ratio in aerial combat from about 2-to-1 to approximately 12-to-1 in favor of the US.
  - In air-to-ground combat: The development of "smart bombs" coupled with effective ECCM equipment, tactics, and techniques made possible the devastating Linebacker I and II attacks against North Vietnam. Fixed-wing gunships and use of long-range navigation (LORAN D) were also important developments.
  - In ground combat: The evolution of the various helicopters used in airmobile operations and improvements in their operational capabilities, ordnance, tactics and techniques was perhaps the most conspicuous development in this category. Night vision devices made an important and welcome contribution.
- Sensors were improved significantly and, after being grossly misused in the McNamara Line (Project MASON or Operation DYE MARKER), proved to be extremely useful in the defense of Khe Sanh (1968). That experience illustrates that to be effective, even the most sophisticated and useful devices have to be used properly.

- The Defense establishment was poorly organized and its procedures were too cumbersome for quick-reaction R&D support. Those developing technology rarely had control of the funds required for the development. The Navy was the only Service which consistently permitted those who were in control of the technical aspects of R&D to have control of the funding.
- The airmobile concept was proven valid in the specific environment in which it was employed in Vietnam, where the US had air supremacy and enemy air defenses within RVN were not sophisticated through 1972. The helicopter's survivability can only be assessed in the context of the enemy's location, weapons, and air defense capabilities and the scenario in which the helicopter will be employed plus the suppressive fire power available. The Soviets studied the airmobile operations in Vietnam and have since improved and enlarged their capability. Someone learned a lesson.
- The time, effort, priorities, and funds given to the production of technical innovations during the Vietnam War were a significant, positive factor in the prosecution of the war. Without technical innovations, the war would have been even more costly in lives.

#### LESSONS

It requires an organized effort to relate field commanders' requirements to scientific capability, and, to be effective, the scientific R&D effort should include joint representation. In time of hostilities, special funding is required to overcome the lack of lead time normally found in the budget cycle.

The military Services, except for the Air Force, tend to be too slow in fielding new materiel and in going into procurement.

Quick reaction to requirements can be obtained best if Service R&D organizations are allocated funds and technical responsibility for examining and resolving specific requirements.

INSIGHTS

Allies

- The call for Third Nation (Free World) military forces in support of South Vietnam came principally from the US and was supported reluctantly by the GVN. The military/combat assistance from Third Countries was minimal except for Australian and New Zealand forces and was, in the cases of the Thai and Filipino forces, actually more of a liability.
- Our experience with our Asian allies in South Vietnam highlighted another important issue - Asians do not necessarily get along better with other Asians than do whites. The US desire to gain more flags, and specifically to gain Asian flags, resulted in the introduction of nationalities which were not always compatible with the native South Vietnamese. Specifically, the South Vietnamese feared the South Korean soldiers and found them to be arrogant and cruel.
- Finally, the way in which the USG opted to fight in Vietnam and the command arrangements that evolved were inefficient. There does not appear to be any evidence that the number of flags in RVN cloaked the US/Free World operations with any greater legitimacy than otherwise would have existed. The principal value of allied participation seems to have been the size of the ROK forces, which enabled them to control a substantial amount of territory in II CTZ, thereby facilitating the economy of force operations characterized by the US 4th Infantry Division in the Central Highlands.



LESSONS

Our experience with coalition war in Vietnam suggests the need for carefully examining the advantages and disadvantages of the participation of Third Nation forces in a limited war; psychological and political support of allies are needed, but it is essential that the separate allies' interests and objectives regarding participation in the effort be considered also. By knowing one's allies better, it may be possible to anticipate the extent of their contribution to the effort and the cost to the US of that contribution.

It may be more appropriate to deploy an ally's small elite forces than to use large cumbersome units. Attaching an ally's battalions or brigades to a US division as was done during the Korean War would be a more effective use of troops, assuming that such a relationship was feasible politically from the Allies' standpoint.

The separate or mutual goals of allies may change over time and thereby strengthen or weaken an alliance; it behooves a nation continually to assess its treaty commitments and obligations and to be prepared to extricate itself from those which lose their usefulness. Once entered into and while in force, treaties should be respected and their provisions adhered to.

In the desire to gain more flags in any contingency situation, US decision makers should carefully weigh the advantages in receiving moral and political support from some allies in place of support from possibly cumbersome, inept, or expensive combat units.

OVERALL LESSON FOR BOOK 2, VOLUME VI

Many of the functions analyzed in this book tend to be neglected in peacetime on the operational and tactical levels and are left to the initiative of the various specialists, many of whom are in the Reserve Components. Under the pressure of war, these functions are expanded rapidly and expensively, and often each develops an almost irreversible and independent rationale and momentum, which tends to frustrate unity of effort.

VOLUME VII  
THE SOLDIER

## THE SOLDIER

Of the 27 million men who came of draft age between 1964 and 1973 nearly 16 million, or over 60 percent, avoided induction by a variety of legal or illegal means. Over half a million left the military with less-than-honorable discharges. Over half a million committed apparent draft offenses. Approximately two million served in Vietnam. A quarter of a million were wounded. Over 50,000 died.

The men within each of these categories did not necessarily represent an average cross section of America's youth. The average American soldier who saw combat in Vietnam was from a poorer-than-average socio-economic group and had a limited education. There was a disproportionately high chance that he would be from a racial minority. This was not a new phenomenon in the history of war; the lower echelons of society have often borne the brunt of combat responsibilities.

Military manpower procurement policies felt the effects of the changing political situation, as is reflected in both their de facto and de jure operations. The basic framework of the Selective Service System survived through much of the war. There were a few significant alternations, and these tended to mirror political rather than military demands. The decision not to call up the Reserves until late in the war, and then in only a limited capacity, was one such policy. So was Project 100,000. The policy decision regarding tours of duty was not wholly political, though it suited political needs. The institution of the lottery and then the All-Volunteer Army were directly tied to the political and military events of the Vietnam period. The de facto policy that failed to narrow the education, medical, Reserve, and other loopholes that tended to be used by the more privileged groups of society clearly had a political as well as some military basis, and they transformed the Reserve Component into an agency for legal draft avoidance.

Only after the Pueblo incident, the beginning of the Tet offensive, and the assassination attempt on the life of the President of South Korea were the JCS successful in winning a limited call-up of 37,000 guardsmen

and reservists. Less than half were sent to Vietnam, and no other reserves were called up during the war. The call-up had its problems. Due to equipment shortages, personnel problems, and little or no warning, mobilized units required longer-than expected training times. Some of President Johnson's political fears were realized: numerous complaints were sent by guardsmen to their congressmen, and some units even challenged the legality of the call-up.

The Army faced a massive task during the Vietnam War in training, equipping, and deploying a force which, at its peak, numbered more than 500,000 men. It also advised, trained, and equipped the RVNAF. And both armies were simultaneously fighting a clever, shadowy insurgent enemy with a tough, resourceful main force organization. Training and indoctrination were not always at their best, but they accomplished the job that was necessary, particularly during the first four and a half years of the fighting. During the last three years of the American combat presence in Vietnam, serious problems arose which affected training and indoctrination to a marked degree.

At no time during the war was troop indoctrination more important than in the 1969-1972 period, when US public support of the war was dropping and when the media and Congress were questioning continued US presence in Southeast Asia. Yet trained leadership capable of instilling a requisite amount of military indoctrination was too often found wanting during the same period, particularly in base camps and other rear areas. During that period and throughout the entire war, the US soldier had only a vague notion of the causes of the conflict, its background, the issues involved, and, most of all, what US national goals were in Vietnam. Indoctrination was primarily realized by acquired experience and osmosis in-country, rather than by planned training, education, and indoctrination by the US military and political leadership.

Many factors external to the military created an environment that made leadership and adherence to the highest ethical standards difficult for even the best officers. There were also factors internal to the military, but very difficult to change, which created an institutional bias towards

ticket punching, careerism, and other aspects of what has been labelled the "new ethic." Falsified accounts of achievements, inflated body counts, serious awards inflation, base-camp luxuries, corruption and other hypocritical actions, were all associated with careerism and were usually readily apparent to the average 'grunt.'

The Army has moved increasingly towards making the skills required of business leaders those necessary for a successful military career. Related to careerism and this managerial ethic is the pervasiveness of the "can-do" ethic. In some cases, of which our Vietnam involvement ended up constituting an important example, the Army and its leaders have to accept that it "can't do," whether this is because of military or political reasons.

There was little racial friction among combat soldiers. Even though the primary group had disintegrated, a soldier's life still depended largely on the actions of fellow soldiers. Just as combat troops strongly discouraged drug use among their fellows, amicable race relations could also be a matter of life or death.

The situation was somewhat different where life was not at stake. Among non-combat troops in Vietnam and soldiers throughout the rest of the world, polarization occurred. Blacks tended to associate with blacks and whites tended to associate with whites. This was largely a function of the rising social awareness of the black soldiers in the 1960s. After 1969 with the lessening of the American combat role and the build up of the American support posture, racial tensions became more evident. Other factors which aggravated the morale and discipline problems also fueled racial antagonisms and vice versa.

Throughout the war, both alcohol and illicit drugs were easily available in Vietnam; their respective use depended mainly on whether the consumer was willing to pay prevailing rates or accept the risks associated with drug use. As is the case in the civil sector of the American society, alcohol is legal and socially acceptable in moderation; illicit drugs, on the other hand, are not. The situation in Vietnam reflected American social customs.

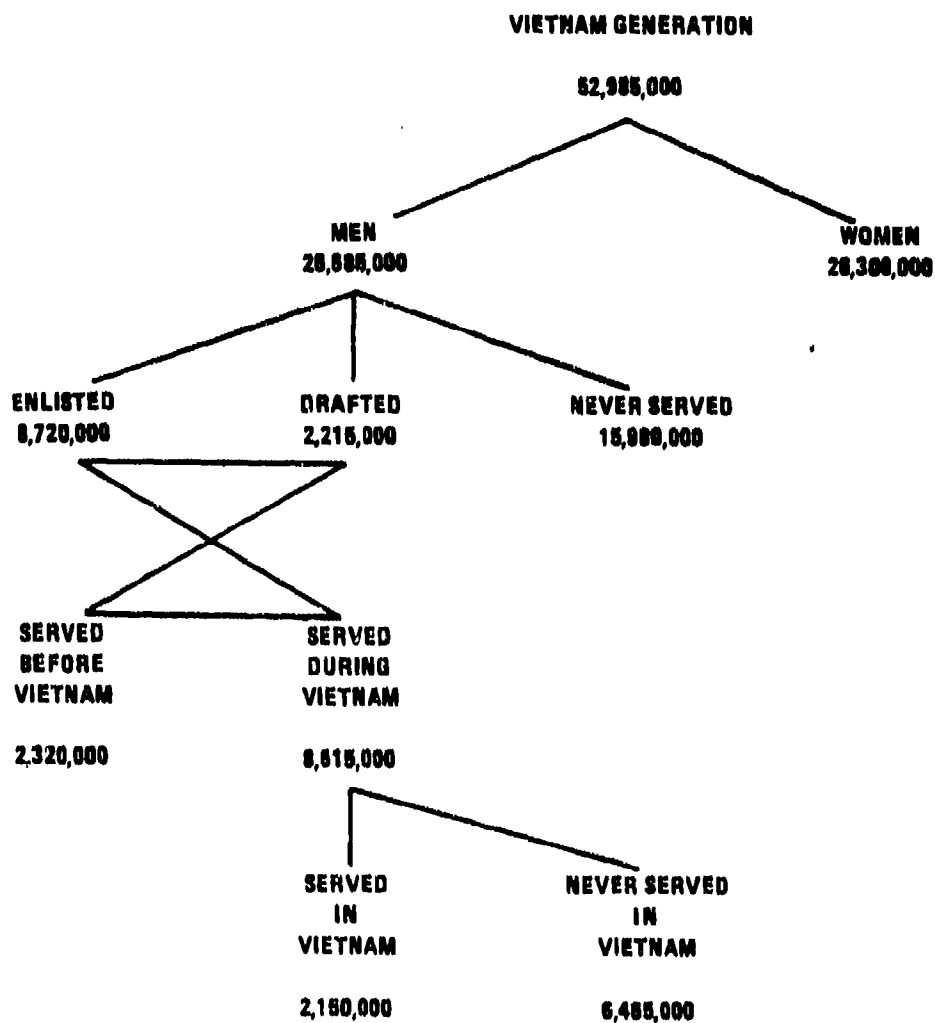
Alcohol was by far the most common drug choice of officers and NCO's, though, indeed, alcoholism was the most serious drug problem in the military as a whole.

US strategy in Vietnam was shaped by political constraints and the "American Way of War," and in that sense it was not directly affected by the specific characteristics of the American soldier of that particular period. The American military system tends to rely on maximum use of technology and fire power. The dominance of these factors is clearly evident in the way the war unfolded. The soldier generally rode into the combat zone in a helicopter or other vehicle, his mobility far exceeding that of the enemy: until he was afoot. Then the enemy had the advantage.

In contrast with military strategy, the tactics employed by US leaders in Vietnam were influenced by the characteristics of the soldier and the changes that occurred in him over time. The excellent quality of the officer and NCO leadership in the early days (1965-67) was matched by the excellent quality and morale of the enlisted personnel. Good commanders made up for shortcomings in Vietnam-oriented training, to some extent, by conducting in-country training, but American soldiers still blundered into ambushes and booby traps too often and small-unit tactics were often found wanting.

During the US withdrawal from RVN, 1969-1972, US combat activities became more and more defensive in nature. At the same time the quality of draftees and officer accessions dropped. In RVN, personnel were often transferred between units to achieve more balanced rotation dates within units, thereby further destroying unit cohesion and primary group relationships. The impact of these and other factors on the morale and esprit of the troops was quite severe. Unit commanders became increasingly more cautious and less aggressive on the battlefield for both political and pragmatic reasons.

See Figure VII-1 which depicts the Vietnam generation.



4541/78W

Figure VII-1. The Vietnam Generation in Service



INSIGHTS

Socio-Economic •  
Background,  
Personnel  
Policies,  
and the  
Individual  
Soldier

- During the Vietnam War, successive administrations were reluctant to publicize "bad news" of any sort and attempted to minimize the domestic demands of the Vietnam policy. Thus the public, increasingly attached to its burgeoning comfort, was poorly prepared and often not very willing to make the necessary sacrifices for even a "limited" war effort. Personnel policies reflected this situation, and the poorer, poorly educated combat soldier whom these policies tended to generate bore the brunt of the fighting.
- The Selective Service System demonstrated serious and inequitable flaws in its application to the Vietnam War. For example, failure to mobilize the National Guard and Reserves made the Reserves a haven for legal draft avoidance. The Reserve component's authorized strength swelled during the Vietnam War, but since abolition of the draft and reliance on the "All-Volunteer Service," the Reserve component has been depleted seriously, resulting, in 1979, in approximately a 50 percent shortfall in the minimal recruitment requirement at a time when regular enlistments are falling off sharply, particularly in ground combat forces.
- Project 100,000 and other social programs placed an inordinate burden on the military services, particularly the Army and Marine Corps which had to field combat soldiers. The burden was felt in the basic and advanced training centers, but its greatest impact was in the area of military discipline and courts-martial. Earlier studies had indicated the unsuitability of men such as those recruited under Project 100,000.
- De facto personnel policies allowed massive draft avoidance which tended to favor the already more privileged members of society and caused resentment among many of those who did serve, causing morale, leadership, and disciplinary problems.

LESSONS

Major and long-term changes occurred in public attitudes during the Vietnam War, most of which initially were not directly related to the hostilities but which were accelerated or amplified because of the war. Military authorities must keep apprised of and understand societal changes if they expect to achieve optimum efficiency in commanding new personnel and in personnel policy management.

The political parameters constraining military policy decisions must be fully understood if either of them is to be controlled to any extent. If political parameters prove inflexible, military means and/or ends must be adjusted accordingly. Together political and military limits define the "realm of the possible" for future policies.

INSIGHTS

Training and  
Indoctrination

- Despite many obvious shortcomings, the Army's training effort during the Vietnam War was a remarkable and comprehensive effort, accomplished without mobilizing the Reserve assets.
- The BCT, AIT, basic officer, and the scores of specialist schools in the Army training system were generally responsive to requirements worldwide and particularly to requirements in Vietnam. Lessons learned in combat were fed into the system, with varying degrees of success in lesson assimilation.
- Units that trained and deployed as units generally performed far better than those in which personnel were assigned as individuals. The "train and retain" concept, while more expensive than one in which individuals are assigned separately, pays off in results, and in the long run may prove to be cheaper owing to the higher calibre of trained soldiers.
- Unit schools are essential, particularly in a combat zone, and brigade and division levels are the best equipped to conduct professional unit schools.
- The key trainers are company and battalion commanders because of their experience, proximity to the troops, and the nature of their tactical responsibilities. However, these commanders require the interest, support, and guidance of their seniors if they are to ensure the best possible training and indoctrination of the US soldier.
- The one-year combat tour and the six-month command tour, in vogue during the Vietnam conflict, operated to the detriment of training. Some commanders seemed to believe their short tours absolved them from the responsibility of resolving underlying training and leadership deficiencies in their units. Problems could be left unsolved for the next commander. This is not an indictment of the many excellent commanders who served in Vietnam, but the record does show that there was a substantial number of opportunists in command positions in Vietnam.
- The combat efficiency and unit cohesion that was evident in the early days of the war, at least until the post-Tet drawdown began, suggests that indoctrination was not a serious problem within the Army at that time. Most divisions conducted indoctrination for newly arrived troops which enhanced their orientation, acclimatization, and knowledge of the rules of engagement.

- Indoctrination programs conducted during 1970-1972 appear to have been ineffective. This was due in large measure to the changing society and its impact on the young recruit coupled with antiwar sentiments expressed by the media and Congress during the US drawdown. The services were slow to acknowledge or recognize the changed situation and to initiate remedial action. Training and indoctrination alone could not be expected to produce the desired results in combat; however, since personnel policies often destroyed unit cohesion through transfers designed to balance individual rotation dates.

#### LESSONS

Training, supervision of training, and teaching subordinate commanders how to train is a command responsibility which, if exercised properly, will produce combat effective units. To carry out this responsibility, field grade and general officers must know their business and they must discharge their training responsibilities aggressively and enthusiastically.

Changes in formal school curricula tend to be slow in coming and, therefore, are not always responsive to the changing needs of commanders in the field. Unit schools, or in-country training, therefore, constitutes the commander's best tool for influencing the quality and readiness of his unit. The quality of these schools is in direct proportion to the experience and ability of the personnel assigned to run the schools.

### INSIGHTS

#### Leadership and Ethics

- Many factors external to the military created an environment that made leadership and adherence to the highest ethical standards difficult for even the best officers. There were also factors internal to the military, but very difficult to change, which created an institutional bias towards ticket punching, careerism, and other aspects of what has been labelled the "new ethic."
- The leadership task confronted by Army officers became overwhelming when their subordinates equated them with the war effort, which, as time went on, became more-and-more manifestly futile.
- The lack of unit cohesion caused by the six-month command tour, inter-unit transfers to achieve rotation-date balances, and the individual rather than unit replacement, militated not only against primary-group identification and ties, but against the creation and maintenance of a healthy relationship between commanders and their troops.
- The problem of decreasing officer and NCO quality was a serious and possibly insoluble problem. Recruitment efforts can be upgraded and training procedures improved, but public support is essential to the availability of a willing manpower pool and the development of high quality, ethical leaders.

### LESSONS

Some accommodation must be reached between the inevitably bureaucratic nature of the armed forces and the imperatives that have developed for success within these bureaucracies. In particular, phenomena such as the "can-do" ethic and the "zero-defect" syndrome must be recognized as prevalent in the US military but somehow they must be kept from becoming career-related obsessions that undermine professional ethics.

The relationship between the existence of high standards of leadership and ethics and the political environment in which military operations are conducted must always be remembered. There are limits to the survivability of even the healthiest institutions in a non-supportive environment.

INSIGHTS

Morale and  
Discipline

- There is a great variety of evidence available to indicate the existence of morale and discipline problems among US forces in Vietnam, problems that varied significantly depending on location, position in the Armed Forces, specific duties, leadership, and time.
- The most important factors adversely affecting morale and discipline--some old, some new with Vietnam--include factors implicit in the nature of the Vietnam conflict (such as limited direct-enemy contact and the psychological stress associated with the sporadic, unpredictable mine and booby trap threat, limited indications of progress and even purpose, antipathy towards the South Vietnamese, idleness and boredom, increased contact with visible privilege and other inequities); flaws or side effects of various personnel policies; the hypocrisy and frustrations associated with careerism; problems originating in society; the perceived inadequacy of civilian support; the intensification of problems brought about by the drawdown; and, connected with many of these, the gulf or cultural gap separating leaders from followers--usually draftees and other non-career personnel from career officers and NCOs--which made good leadership particularly difficult and poor leadership particularly disastrous.

LESSONS

The goals for achieving high levels of morale and discipline are clearer than the methods for achieving them, but problems such as the adverse effects of "opportunistic careerism" or service personnel policies that impact unfavorably on morale and discipline can and must be addressed and corrected.

Good training and indoctrination, but more important, good professional leadership, will usually sustain morale and discipline even in adversity; poor leadership of itself will hurt or destroy them.

### INSIGHTS

#### Race Relations

- Race problems remain in the military today. The interaction of factors causing or aggravating racial tensions is so complex that it is next-to-impossible to determine with any certainty the impact of racial tensions alone on the conduct of the war and the implications of that impact for the post-Vietnam military.
- Racial tensions were rarely overt on combat missions and thus had only a limited impact on combat effectiveness overall.
- In rear areas, where troop concentrations and boredom sometimes coincided, problems erupted in which racial tensions sometimes played a role, even if not always a dominant one. The military, which was usually not responsible for generating the racist feelings, did not always handle the problem well, though there were significant exceptions to this generalization. Good leadership when present, minimized this and other problems.
- American troop feelings about the interaction with the Vietnamese people left room for improvement. Race seemed to be one factor--the defining factor if nothing else--in the general resentment that developed. The problem was no different in any significant way from that experienced by other armies in other foreign countries, except in RVN many US soldiers perceived that the RVNAF were not fighting their own war and, therefore, they often were antagonistic in their attitudes and relations with the RVNAF.

### LESSON

Though the military cannot control racism in society, it has various avenues of recourse within its jurisdiction. Effective programs must be, and must be perceived as being, fair, consistent, and as having sufficient "teeth" to achieve their objectives. The development of good leadership should be the sine qua non of such programs.

INSIGHTS

- Psychological Effects
- Psychiatric casualties, common to most wars, were also present in Vietnam but at lower rates than were experienced in World War II and Korea.
  - A variety of factors affected the incidence of these casualties. Some of the factors were not new to Vietnam--indeed some are very old. The most important of these is exposure to combat, which includes: the workings and cohesiveness of the primary group, the quality of leadership, the age and background of the combatants, including their pre-existing psychological problems, the nature of society, and the quality of training. Other factors affecting mental health which were unique to or especially significant in Vietnam include: the operation and effects of the one-year tour of duty and six-month command tours and related policies, the nature of the combat (the tactics, the confusion of enemy and allied personnel and civilians, the rules of engagement, the nature of the support system, and so on), the quality of the medical and psychiatric support systems, and the ready availability of drugs, to name some of the more important.
  - Contrary to the beliefs of many, the impact of the antiwar movement, while not negligible, seems to have played only a minor stress-provoking role.
  - A variety of coping mechanisms were observed in Vietnam as in other wars. These included religious faith, rituals, superstitions, various forms of escapism, excessive sleep, spending sprees, identification with an authority figure, fusion with the group, escape into work, drug or alcohol abuse, humor, reading, and over-eating, to name only a few. Those who failed to develop effective coping mechanisms or whose mechanisms were unacceptable were those most likely to need psychiatric assistance.

LESSON

Proper management of psychological stress in wartime necessitates a close understanding of both individual and group psychology and the operation of factors effecting mental health in general, and more specifically in wartime.



INSIGHTS

Drug Abuse

- The pattern and incidence of drug abuse in Vietnam was not markedly different than that encountered by American soldiers worldwide during that same period.
- Changing mores and societal attitudes made drug use generally acceptable among the younger generation at a time that coincided with increased force commitments to Vietnam where high-quality drugs were readily available at very low cost. This combination largely accounts for the incidence of drug abuse in Vietnam; the drug problem should have been foreseeable.
- Fear of battle or of becoming a casualty was not the major reason for drug use, as had been assumed by many; boredom, routine tedium, the desire to "kill time," peer pressure, and coping with an unfamiliar physical and military environment are cited as major reasons for drug use in Vietnam.
- Generally, members of units with lower drug usage reflected higher esteem for their unit leaders; these non-users felt their leaders to be interested in their personal welfare and helpful to them in fulfilling their duty assignments.
- There is at least circumstantial evidence that very few soldiers who were actively engaged in combat were under the influence of drugs; rather, they showed "drug sense" and avoided its use when exposed to combat situations. There is, however, very little evidence of the effects of drugs on combat readiness and performance of combat troops in the field or in exposed fire bases.
- There is substantial evidence of dangerous levels of drug use in rear areas and base camps, particularly after 1970, to a degree that would seriously have impaired combat efficiency had those locales been subjected to strong enemy attacks. In part, the composite organizational structure and generally relaxed discipline of major installations in rear areas, contributed to the incidence of disciplinary problems, including drug abuse.
- US officials did not anticipate the nature and extent of the drug abuse problem, especially its increasing rate after 1968. Initiatives at drug education/orientation programs had little effect because of failure to understand the basic causes for drug usage in Vietnam.
- The amnesty program and related treatment and rehabilitation programs did succeed in ridding the services of unrehabilitatives and undesirables. As a consequence of its failure to anticipate the drug abuse problem, the Army initially had no effective activity/work programs to divert potential users from drugs, and the subsequent response to the drug epidemic in many cases was "too little, too late."

LESSONS

To cope with drug abuse problems, leaders of all ages and grades need to understand the causal nature of the drug problem. Leaders should not have to learn these skills by on-the-job training but rather should be schooled in the fundamentals of drug abuse and the means for preventing, detecting, and handling drug problems.

The principal inducement for drug use is boredom, and boredom can be prevented by intelligent, professional leaders who know and understand the problem and who provide meaningful and satisfying work/activities, opportunities, and recognition to their troops.

A variety of drug abuse detection measures have been developed, but they have generally been subject to manipulation by clever drug users. Surprise inspection and testing has proven to be the best way to uncover users, but preventing drug use in the first place is the best tactic, which requires knowledge about the problem and leadership in dealing with it.

Beating the drug problem cannot be accomplished solely by the military services; extensive cooperation between many government agencies is needed at the top level, and that cooperation must extend down to the lower operating levels.

VOLUME VIII  
RESULTS OF THE WAR

RESULTS OF THE WAR

The Vietnam War coincided with radical social changes worldwide. In America those changes were marked by increases in social mobility and affluence, a decline in the importance of family and community, the onset of the women's movement, black militancy, and upheavals within the American education system.

Various US governmental institutions and the US public's attitude towards them also changed during the course of US involvement in Vietnam. The credibility of the American government and its officials were called into question largely because of the inept management and explanations of the war and of the economy, exacerbated by the eruption of Watergate and the exposure of illegal CIA operations. In the latter two cases, the US Congress served as the primary vehicle for probing and investigating the issues. Congress gradually reasserted and redefined its role in both domestic and foreign policy matters.

Because of the Vietnam War the image of the US has been significantly reduced in stature, both at home and abroad. Only about 10% of the world's 140 nations sympathized with US actions in Indochina. During that war, friend and foe alike had their first real opportunity to see how the US behaves under enormous pressure over the long term. The constitutional problems and frailties (and strengths) inherent in the US system became apparent. The US was unable or unwilling to do what it wanted to do in Vietnam--to force the North to stop doing what it was doing to the South.

The withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam in 1973 was greeted with considerable relief by NATO allies and with mixed emotions by America's Asian allies. The leaders of the PRC were disappointed and angered by the US failure, since a unified pro-Soviet Vietnam constituted a threat on China's southern border. US failure to achieve its goals in Indochina, followed by the fall of Saigon and the capitulation of Cambodia in 1975 violated the expectations of most Americans in a profound manner. Self-image was bound to suffer, and US credibility as an ally was bound to be questioned by friends and enemies.

In terms of foreign policy, the "no more Vietnams/never again" syndrome resulted in the USG's extreme reluctance to respond to Soviet and proxy initiatives in Africa, The Middle East, and elsewhere, with any sort of military move. Another significant result of the war appears to be the rejuvenated interest in NATO. Other major changes in commitments and in foreign policy stem more from the changing world situation, President Carter's human rights policies and predilections, and other matters having little to do with the Vietnam War.

The posture of the military forces has been altered substantially since the Vietnam War ended. Army divisions have largely been converted from the light, infantry-oriented structures of the Vietnam era to heavy divisions more suitable for potential conflict in Central Europe. Reliance on round-out brigades provided by the Reserve Component reflects the need to mobilize the Reserve establishment in the event of major hostilities. All of the Services had to delay modernization and upgrading inventories during the Vietnam War and have yet to catch up. A contemporary appraisal of various threats reveals serious shortfalls in US strategic mobility assets needed to deter or meet those threats. In addition, the posture of the US military forces has been affected by congressional reaction to the Vietnam War. Abolition of the Selective Service system and adoption of the All Volunteer Force has made it difficult for the Services to recruit and retain the numbers and types of personnel needed.

The dominant threat to the Free World continues to be the Soviet Union which has dramatically altered the regional and world balance of power as a direct result of the Vietnam War. Failure by the US to fund the war properly required that cuts be made in research and development, modern weapon systems, operations and maintenance, new construction, and other long-term investments. As a consequence the US Services are weakened in several key areas. During that same period, the Soviets increased their military spending and modernized their forces and those of their Warsaw Pact allies. The USSR now surpasses the US in several strategic capabilities and has a marked conventional warfare superiority in Europe. Significantly, the Soviets have developed and improved their capability (and that

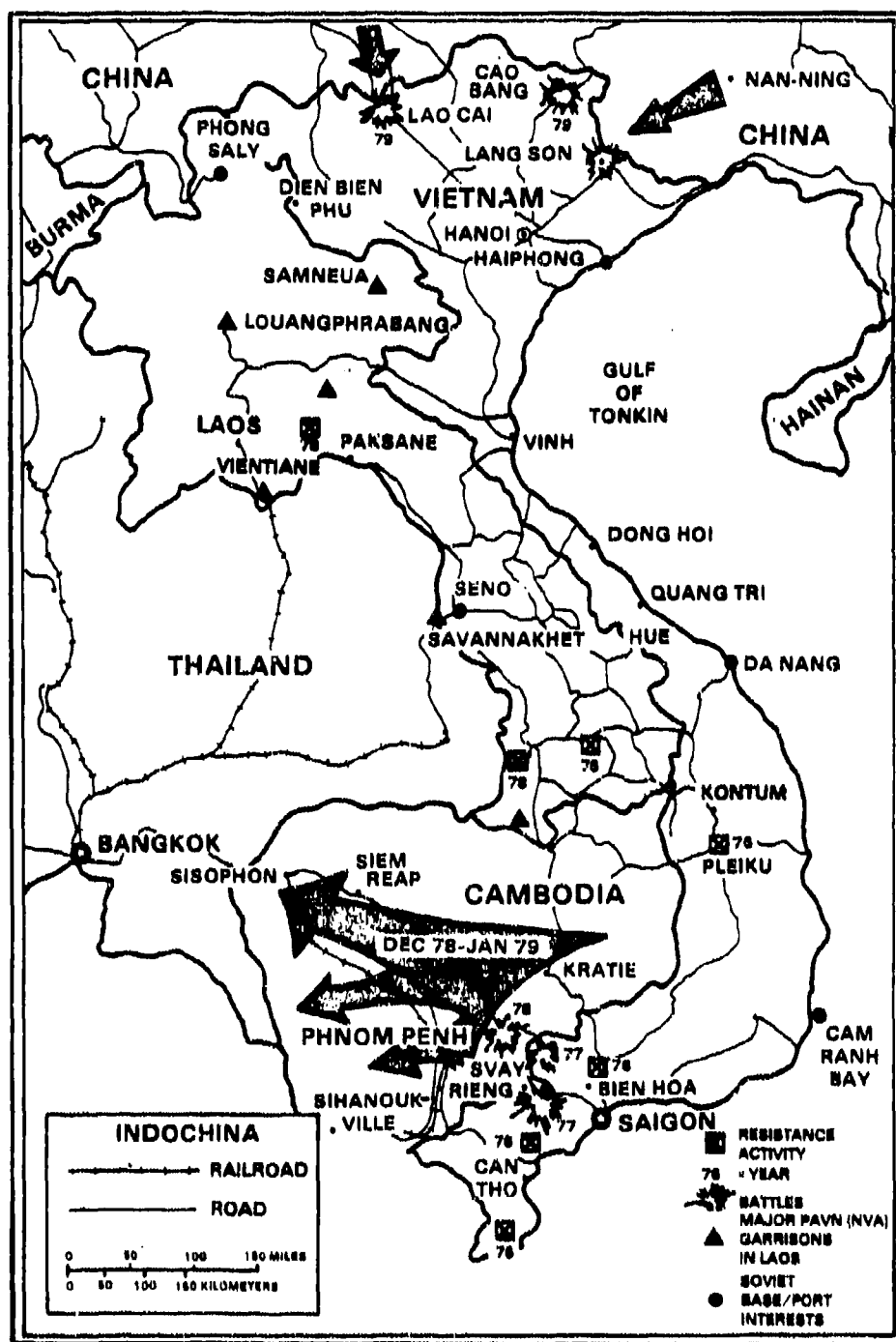
## THE BDM CORPORATION

of Cuba) to project their forces well beyond the confines of the Warsaw Pact area.

US alliances and commitments have undergone significant changes, but only partly as a result of the Vietnam War. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) has ceased to exist although the treaty remains in force. The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) ceased to function after the Shah of Iran was deposed. The US bilateral defense treaty with the Republic of China was abrogated by the President of the United States, perhaps more in response to our changing relationship with the PRC than as a result of the Vietnam War. Yet the US remains committed to collective security without having found a way to terminate a treaty relationship neatly.

All of the results of the war are not yet apparent, and caution must be exercised in deciding what resulted from the war and what stemmed entirely from other causes.

Map VIII-1 depicts some of the continuing conflicts in Southeast Asia, 1975-1979.



4541/75W

Map VIII-1. Areas of Continuing Conflict, 1975-1979

INSIGHTS AND SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Lessons from  
History: An  
Introduction

- While the Vietnam example may be of limited applicability to future policy decisions, primarily because of its unique features, it is also just as obvious that historical events all share some common elements, allowing for some degree of instructive and predictive analysis regarding potential, future crises. Even the most unusual cases of history can be instructive.
- Lessons of history will continue to be debated and remain difficult to draw, dependent as they are on personal assessment and value judgments. Rational, systematic explanations cannot always be imposed even in retrospect. The operation of unknown or unexpected variables must, thus, be allowed for. Useful lessons must take this into account.
- If experience in the past is not to be lost, if history is not to disintegrate beyond all intelligible recovery, the difficulty in pursuing lessons and results must not, consequently, stop it from being attempted. Extreme caution and an open mind can help reduce some of the uncertainty. In looking to history for understanding, it is well to remember that events which seem deep in the past were once far in the future. In looking to the future for preparation, it is well to remember that projecting the present is a far cry from predicting the future.



INSIGHTS AND SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Results of  
Vietnam: The  
United States'  
Foreign Policy  
and the Evolv-  
ing Inter-  
national Order

- Even by cautious estimation, the war had far-reaching effects on both the international scene and the performance of the United States. The rapid change in the status and outlook of the US, occurring as they and did during the period of America's bitter and ultimately unsuccessful involvement in Southeast Asia, are often associated with the war and viewed as its most important legacy. However, Vietnam was only one, albeit important, factor which prompted change and, consequently, it is important that Vietnam-related cause and effect relationships be cautiously drawn and assessed.
- US involvement in Vietnam was the culmination of, not an aberration from, post-World War II policies. The initial American intervention in Vietnam was consistent with the contemporary US national philosophy and objectives, however one evaluates that policy or the relevance of its application to Vietnam. One of the most valuable results of Vietnam is that it has compelled the nation to reexamine its national philosophy and objectives in its effort to appreciate the implications of US involvement in Southeast Asia.
- We must be wary of oversimplification in any treatment of the American intervention in Vietnam on bi-, tri-, and multipolar relationships, for while the imprint of Vietnam can be detected in numerous areas, it by no means constitutes a direct line of tracks leading to specific consequences. The rapidly changing structure of the international scene in some ways made the continuing American presence in Vietnam -- at least by the late 1960s and early 1970s -- something of an anachronism, and it was this character, this limited relevance in the changing world order and the changing US attitude and posture, which thus limited the impact of Vietnam on other foreign policy questions.
- The most significant aspect of change in the post-Vietnam environment is perhaps not just the emergence of pluralism -- of multiple centers of power -- but more the emergence of more variegated centers of power, creating a complicated network of international relationships. There has not only been a diffusion of power, but a confusion. The Soviet-American relationship remained (and remains) critical, but no longer exclusively so.

INSIGHTS AND SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The US Domestic Scene in the Post-Vietnam Environment  
Changes and Results

- The outlook of a people towards its country's role and image in the international order, and towards its the government's credibility and reliability on the whole, is shaped by that nation's successes and failures, both at home and abroad. It is also determined by the extent to which a nation and its people are capable of accepting and creatively integrating change, both positive and negative, into the day-to-day making of domestic and foreign policy. The ability to do so derives from a belief, both on the part of the people and its government leaders, in the fundamental strengths inherent in the country's fabric, and in the need to draw upon these strengths in solving domestic and international problems.
- The decade of active US involvement in Vietnam spanned the activist period of the American civil rights movement, the emergence of a youth subculture, Watergate, the decline of the dollar, intensive space exploration, two Arab-Israeli wars, the beginning of detente, the rise of oil power, and the thaw in US-PRC hostilities. The appearance of a national consensus was shattered as public dissent regarding the American social system was expressed through urban riots and massive antiwar demonstrations. The sanctity and credibility of the American government was called into question and Congressional-Presidential relations ceased to share the bipartisan flavor of the 1950s. Vietnam served, in part, as a catalyst for these developments.
- The "passing" of the Cold War mentality is the trend most readily observable in the public opinion polls and assessments of US-international relations taken during the sixties and seventies. This phenomenon may, in fact, be a natural outgrowth of the "passing" of the World War II generation and the subsequent infusion of a new "Vietnam" generation.
- The US public appears willing to and capable of bouncing back from the deeply troubling Vietnam experience. Nevertheless, it is more suspicious of its leaders' abilities to define US security interests and develop appropriate strategies for their protection. In the wake of Vietnam it is, thus, not surprising that there has been a perceptible "turning inward" on the part of the nation and its people. The need to recover and to initiate a period of national self-evaluation prompted this turn, as did the urgent need to put one's house in order after a decade or more of neglect.

- The Vietnam experience has not resulted in a burgeoning desire for isolationism. The world is too interesting for such a sentiment to reach epidemic proportions. Self-preoccupation more aptly defines the contemporary national spirit. Consequently, Vietnam has exerted at least one appreciable and important effect on the US domestic scene: it has prompted the need and desire for serious dialogue and a reexamination of America's role, domestic and international. It is through this stage of growth and development that the US is now cautiously proceeding.

INSIGHTS AND SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Results for  
the US  
Military:  
Implications  
and Impact

- The years of the United States' protracted military activity in Southeast Asia, particularly during the 1965-1973 time frame in which US forces were committed to a combat role in the region, saw the emergence of a new, somewhat problematic approach to war-related decision making on the national level. The World War II precept of 'do what you must to achieve victory' was replaced by a set of political-military formulae for planning, waging, and ultimately, winning the war. The Johnson years, in particular, witnessed the Commander-in-Chief's extension of his decision-making authority in areas of war management, previously the realm of the nation's top-ranking military commanders and, on occasion, even of front-line or theater commanders. The dictates of a more complex international environment, the availability of highly developed technology for the transmission of Washington-Vietnam wartime communications, and the Commander-in-Chief's individual personality traits which caused him to seek intimate involvement in what were often considered routine matters of war management, all figured prominently in the emergence of this arrangement.
- What has transpired, at least in part as a result of Vietnam, is that the roles of national level decision makers and decision-making bodies in war/crisis management have been (and are still being) subjected to a period of redefinition and refinement. Vietnam served as a 'forum' during which certain command structure deficiencies became apparent; the post-Vietnam period provided and provides a peacetime respite for reviewing and rectifying some of these problems. Future crises will, thus, illuminate the effectiveness of on-going adjustments and, perhaps more essential, will illustrate again how intimately entwined war/crisis management is with present and future political exigencies, causing what some may again regard as a 'hands-tied' approach to waging war or defusing crises.
- Vietnam set the stage for the VOLAR concept and its subsequent implementation. The effects of this political decision for the US armed forces are many and varied; its implications for national military preparedness, for the quality of the nation's military personnel, and for the military's professional image are still being heatedly debated. With the institution of VOLAR, the US armed forces, and particularly the Army, must contend with a shift away from a higher educated, middle-class, white representation in the

services to a less educated, lower class and black/minority representation. This and other related aspects of VOLAR pose fundamental problems for the Army, many of which still require carefully developed solutions.

- The tendency to approach the services as 'just another job' - an outgrowth of the VOLAR recruiting dilemma posed by market considerations - is somewhat inimical to the armed forces' professional and philosophical tradition. The armed forces, which require a soldier to be 'faithful unto death,' must indeed depend on incentives over and above those inspired by financial and career considerations to attract and retain truly dedicated manpower, particularly for leadership positions. In reality, however, the services often seek to attract personnel by offering promises of career opportunities, thereby generating an environment that rewards relatively insignificant indicators of success, and disregarding or discouraging the growth of long-term qualities of moral and ethical strength on which the future of the services depend. Vietnam is not solely responsible for this dilemma, but the war and the stress it placed on US military personnel most definitely contributed to the present state of affairs.
- In the aftermath of Vietnam, the US has indeed turned its attention to those alliances in which it is and has been the most 'comfortable.' What has apparently developed is a desire on the part of the US to uphold, underscore and upgrade its longer-held security alliances, perhaps because the US leadership regards these allies as more important, more deserving, and too long ignored or mistreated during our years in Vietnam. Yet this tendency avoids the issue of our other, smaller, 'less-comfortable' alliances, particularly those less well established with Third World nations. For the US military, faced with the requirement of establishing viable and cohesive military assistance programs and defense pacts, the implications of this tendency are many. The US military will be faced with establishing defense arrangements with peoples who are often unclear about or suspicious of US long-term intentions and objectives, and about whom the US leadership has only sketchy knowledge. The all-important lesson of "Know Your Ally" may, therefore, continue to elude the US in a relatively uncertain and turbulent world.
- In the aftermath of Vietnam, the US has directed a sizeable amount of its defense dollars and energies to the research and development of new, highly complex

weapon systems, to the modernization of materiel and forces neglected during the years of the Vietnam war effort, and to the upgrading and enhancement of systems tried and tested during the conflict. While this development is hardly surprising, it has also caused a great number of military leaders and defense analysts alike to question the nation's 'high-tech' approach to defense and its preoccupation with the performance (vs. manning) of sophisticated technology. While 'pulling the plug' on technology's march forward is not advocated, it is certainly imperative that a compromise be reached between the level of sophisticated technology available and the present-day capabilities of our servicemen. Flexibility is the key: our experience in Vietnam counsels the benefits of such an approach.

- It is not implausible to regard Vietnam as a prologue to an entire chapter of global turbulence in the Third World, characteristic of and unique to international political development in the post-WWII era, and which is unfolding and will continue to unfold with greater rapidity for at least the next several decades. Implicit in this global scenario of turbulence is the question of US response -- shaped as it is by the United States' military-political experiences in Southeast Asia -- and the US military's capacity to train adequately to meet a variety of threats which may occur singly, successively, or simultaneously. Yet, the question arises: are the US forces prepared to cope with threats of both a conventional and non-conventional, quasi-revolutionary nature? And, as a consequence of Vietnam, have the US armed forces, specifically the US Army, zealously over-trained for one type of conflict, to the exclusion of training-readiness for other forms of warfare possible in future, limited engagements? The answers to these questions are intimately entwined with the US perception of limited (non-nuclear) war, shaped (and perhaps altered) as a result of Vietnam.

INSIGHTS AND SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Regional  
Results: The  
New Face of  
Southeast  
Asia

- Despite the desire of many Americans to forget about Indochina, recent events have demonstrated that this region has by no means exhausted its ability to both astonish and to involve the rest of the world -- however reluctant it may be -- in its continuing problems. Interest of the great powers in this region has been demonstrated by the USSR's massive assistance to Hanoi, by Chinese fears of a strong, aggressive Vietnam on its southern doorstep, and by worldwide concern for the Indochinese refugees.
- In addition to imposing its rule in the South, Hanoi has also been faced with the huge task of national reconstruction, particularly in the Northern half of the country where bombing damage was the most severe. The North Vietnamese transportation system was largely destroyed, industrial facilities seriously damaged, and about 1,000 villages devastated. Despite the fact that rebuilding has been ongoing since the final defeat in 1975, the "new" Vietnam still faces pressing economic troubles, both on account of war damage and because of the SRV's rapid expansion of its armed forces, thereby overburdening an already shattered economy.
- With the fall of Saigon in 1975, the Royal Lao Government saw little chance of holding its own and thus declared the war in Laos to be over, capitulating on Hanoi's terms. In December, the Laotian monarchy was abolished and the Democratic People's Republic of Laos established. In a political transformation which passed with little notice in the West, a communist regime was installed in Laos. With the continued presence of both Vietnamese and Soviet forces in the country, it is apparent that Laos will continue to be a pawn and staging area in the continuing struggle for Southeast Asia.
- The tragedy of Cambodia is still being played out today. The post-war revolutionary regime of Pol Pot directed what probably has been the most radical and far-reaching revolution of the twentieth century. Individualism and chaotic license were replaced by radical collectivism and perpetual conditioning, while the regime murdered its subjects by the hundreds of thousands.
- The Vietnamese and the pro-Hanoi forces of Cambodia launched a massive campaign to rout the Pol Pot regime, giving rise to a hot-bed of military activity in Southeast Asia and alarming the world about a possible Third World War. The popular image of the Vietnamese has changed as a result of the Cambodian venture. No longer is Vietnam pictured as brave little "David" struggling against "Goliath." Instead, the Vietnamese are now portrayed as expansionists, however unpopular that view was in the West in the 1960s.

## APPENDICES



APPENDIX A  
ASYMMETRIES IN THE SECOND INDOCHINA WAR

<u>Key Elements</u>		<u>US (RVN*)</u>	<u>DRV/NLF</u>
1.	<u>View of War</u>	Limited	Total
2.	<u>Aim(s)</u>	Ambiguous	Clear & unchanged.
3.	<u>Means/Methods Employed</u>	Minimum necessary to keep from losing (but eventually vast)	All available to achieve aim.
4.	<u>Strategic:</u>	Ultra Western	Modernized Oriental
	• Basis	Usually Direct	Generally Indirect
	• Mode	Inferior	Superior
	• Political-Military Integration	Generally Defensive	Predominately Offensive
	• Posture (Political, Psycho-logical & Military)		
5.	<u>Initiative</u>	Rare (Despite air & naval supremacy)	Predominant
	• Strategic	Seldom (Despite numberless operations)	Normal
	• Tactical	Four plus	One
6.	<u>Theater(s) of War</u>	Fragmented	Unified
7.	<u>Command &amp; Control</u>	Impatient	Patient
8.	<u>Psychological Bias</u>	Major Constraint	Potent Weapon
9.	<u>Time</u>		

10. <u>Leadership (Political &amp; Military)</u>			
11. <u>Manpower</u>	Turbulent	Continuity	Limited, but expendable when necessary
12. <u>"Visions of Victory"</u>	Militarily conventional and numerical	Multifaceted and sophisticated	
13. <u>Doctrine and Tactics for Conflict</u>	Trail and error, but later stereotyped	Tested against French, and periodically refined	
14. <u>Mobility</u>			
• Air	Supreme	Nil	
• Foot	Inferior	Superior	
15. <u>Firepower</u>			
• Overall	Vastly Superior	Very Inferior	
• Close in (50 meters or less)		(less air defense)	
16. <u>Threat to Political System</u>	Debatable	Debatable	
• External	None	Openly proscribed by USG	
• Internal	Serious and growing over time	Kept under strict control	
17. <u>External Support (all types and sources)</u>	Strong at first but decreased over time	Little at first, but increased over time	

\* In most areas the strengths and weaknesses of RVN were quite different from those of the US, but since they were the very dependent junior partners, their freedom of action was constrained, severely, by what the US did or did not do. The same could be said of the NLF from about 1964 on.

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

APPENDIX B

SOME BATTLES: WHOSE VICTORY?

Battles/Dates

Issues

1. Ap Bac, January 1963  
(As often, both sides claimed a victory)
  - a. What had the PLAF (VC) learned about US/RVNAF airborne and mech. infantry tactics?
  - b. What was the net political and psychological impact in RVN and the US? Why?
  - c. What effect on the "credibility gap"?
  - d. What did it reveal about RVNAF leaders and US advisors - field and staff?
  - e. Which side learned and benefited the most?
2. Bien Hoa Air Base, November 1964
  - a. What were the respective "costs" to the US and to the enemy?
  - b. Was anyone at fault? If so, who? Why?
  - c. What was done to preclude future "Bien Hoa's"?
3. Cpt. Bill Carpenter's Fight in the Highlands, June 1966  
(See S.L.A. Marshall's, Battle in the Monsoon)
  - a. What did this battle reveal about the strengths and weaknesses of US operations in jungles and mountains?

- b. Were US small-unit tactics and techniques appropriate for the situation?
- c. Was the fight more typical than not? The meaning?
- d. What were the short and long-term results of the battle?

4. Attleboro; Sept.-Nov. 1966  
(See S.L.A. Marshall's, Ambush, et al.)

- a. Should the opening battles be analyzed separately from the overall campaign? Why?
- b. What does the operation reveal about brigade and battalion level command?
- c. Was tactical intelligence adequate?
- d. What major "lessons" were deduced from the battles and how used?

5. Junction City, Feb-May 1967

- a. Were the results commensurate with the time and resources expended?
- b. What were the major strengths and weaknesses of the op. plan and its execution?
- c. Which side retained the tactical initiative?
- d. What was the overall impact on the VCI and the strength of the NLF and PLAF?

6. 3 Companies at Dak To, November 1967  
(See DA Pam, "7 Firefights in Vietnam")

- a. Had US units absorbed and benefited from the lessons of prior similar operations?
- b. What had the enemy learned about US tactics and techniques? Their counters?
- c. What factors inhibited US foot mobility and the gaining of tactical surprise?
- d. Which side better employed fire and movement?

7. Tet 1968

- Attack on US Embassy

- a. Was it an "insignificant platoon action"?
- b. Each side gained and lost what?
- c. Any "lessons"?
- a. Why was Hue practically undefended?
- b. Why could PLAF and PAVN reinforce and resupply?
- c. The allied counterattacks produced what effects in the US and the world at large?
- d. Why was the "Massacre" not exploited better?
- e. What were the long range effects in RVN; e.g., in 1972 and 1975?

- Battle for Hue

8. Khe Sanh, 1967 and 1968

- a. Was the PAVN siege a masterful, if costly, feat or the main effort?
- b. What was the effect on the US media, the public, the USG, the JCS, and MACV?

- c. What effects, pro and con did it have on the Tet offensive?
- d. Was it a valid US "model" for the future?

9. Hamburger Hill (Ap Bia Mountain)  
May, 1969

- a. Was it necessary and productive?
- b. Were the tactics sound?
- c. Was it in keeping with then current USG and MACV strategy and policy?
- d. What was the impact in the US? Results?

10. Cambodian Incursion, 1970

- a. Was the timing right?
- b. Did the military gains offset the political losses?
- c. What is the meaning for the future?

11. Fire Base Mary Ann, Spring 1971

- a. Has the Army fully and objectively analyzed the battle?
- b. What lessons have been drawn and how applied?

12. Lamson 719 (Laos), Spring 1971

- a. Was the intelligence accurate? Why?
- b. Were the MACV and XXIV Corps plans realistic and flexible?
- c. Were Tac Air and helicopter gunships properly coordinated and employed?

d. What did GVN, USG and MACV (re)discover about RVNAF and Vietnamization? What was done with knowledge prior to Easter 1972?

a. What were the gains and losses of the repeated attacks?

b. On balance, were they "cost effective"?

c. Air attacks usually produce POW/MIA; the implications?

d. What has, or can, the USG and the US military learn from Thanh Hoa?

e. Are there any implications for the US Army?

a. Intelligence or evaluation failure?

b. Effect on DRV and PRC?

c. Effect on US POW's?

d. On balance a plus or minus?

e. Implication's for present and future?

### 13. Air Battles for Thanh Hoa Bridge,

1965-68 & '72

(See USAF, Tale of Two Bridges, etal)

### 14. Son Tay Raid 1970

NOTES: 1) The battles and issues listed are more representative than inclusive, and are not necessarily balanced.

2) As discussed in the text, both sides could, and did, claim "victories" in these battles with some justification.

3) The point to be made is that ideally battles should be fought in accordance with the military strategy which, above all, should support national policy and assist in achieving the ultimate aim. (Subordinates and the enemy, of course, don't always cooperate.)

Final Questions

What is the relationship between battlefield activity and initiative? What do US Service Schools teach about that phenomenon?

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis



APPENDIX C  
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AMERICAN WAY OF WAR

1. INTRODUCTION

The complex, protracted and costly conflict in Southeast Asia clearly exposed and severely tested the strengths and weaknesses of the American Way of War.

2. GENERAL

US methods and means of making war are based on the political system, culture, economy, historical experience, and national psyche to include attitudes about life and sports. Our way does not have a solid, coherent philosophical foundation, but rather consists of bits of Jomini, Clausewitz, etc. and is dominated by pragmatic expediency: it is a natural offspring of the American Way of Life.

3. SPECIFIC INGREDIENTS/CHARACTERISTICS AND TRENDS

Our way:

- Depends on superior science and technology
- Requires heavy preponderance of materiel
- Demands vast superiority in air and ground firepower
- Demands machine-based mobility - ground, air, and sea
- Needs large logistics "tail"
- Requires large staffs (op and tech) to plan and coordinate
- Substitutes "things" (materiel, money, etc.) for US lives and limbs.
- Is extremely expensive - and getting more so
- Is usually quite efficient, if sometimes ineffective/inappropriate

## THE BDM CORPORATION

- Is ponderous, direct and unsubtle
- Is permeated by "Can do" spirit, and need to "win" every battle, and thus often impels commanders to "reinforce failure" or avenge defeats.
- Attracts/molds leaders who tend to be pragmatic "workaholics" with little time or inclination for reflective philosophical thinking.
- Is increasingly dominated by managers, technicians, and logisticians.
- Strategists and even tacticians are of secondary importance in the system.\*
- Is best suited for fighting similar type forces/doctrines, and least suited for combating subtle, sophisticated "People's War".
- Tends to separate - artificially - the political, psychological and military aspects of warfare.
- Is relatively inflexible in adjusting to a variety of limited political aims.
- Has gravitated towards the hard "science" end of the strategic and tactical spectrum and away from the more esoteric "art" form; therefore despite expensive and sophisticated intelligence hardware and techniques it is often susceptible to surprise in a variety of forms.
- Successful operations and tactics tend to become stereotyped and ritualized; objective, comprehensive, and critical self analysis is rare, and that which is conducted is usually overly oriented on statistics.
- The awesome American military power (in quantity, quality and variety) has resulted in a tendency to overestimate ones own net capabilities and to underestimate that of "third world" enemies; possibly the reverse is true concerning the USSR.
- Is geared towards "finding, fixing, fighting, and finishing" an enemy as quickly as possible; thus "attrition" is a natural and attractive strategic (and tactical) option.

## THE BDM CORPORATION

- Is dynamically action oriented and tends towards overwhelming an enemy instead of outsmarting or even outmaneuvering him; thus deception, psychological, and unconventional operations are little understood or appreciated and remain as second class operational adjuncts.

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis

- \* This trend has encouraged and invited civilians, of many disciplines, to intrude into what had been the exclusive preserve of the military professionals in technical and even tactical matters.

APPENDIX D

STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL IMBALANCES: AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

- Bases for Strategy = Science + Art\*
- Strategic Elements = Physical + Mental/Psychological\*
- Strategic Medium = Time + Space + Psyche\*
- Strategic/Tactical Modes = Direct + Indirect\*
- Operational/Tactical Equation = Fire + Maneuver/Movement\*
- Doctrinal Bias = Narrow/Fixed or Broad/Flexible\*

(Question: Should these imbalances be corrected and if so how, how much and how fast?)

SOME OTHER ISSUES

- Should strategy/operations/tactics be based on pitting ones strengths against enemy vulnerabilities while protecting and/or concealing ones own weaknesses? Are current "net assessments" thorough and objective enough to provide a sound basis for such calculations or are they overly oriented on "counting and comparing beans"? (Note above imbalances)
- What are the "real world" bases for doctrine and force structure? What should they be ideally? Is there a better middle ground between the pragmatic and the theoretical?
- What is the role (and value) of deception, psychological and unconventional operations? Are they nice to have adjuncts when time, priorities, and resources permit, or are they potentially powerful "force multipliers"? Are they really compatible with the American Way of War?
- Are our current personnel systems (e.g. OPMS, EPMS, MOS, etc.) capable of transitioning rapidly and effectively from peace to war--limited or not? What lessons have been learned and accommodated for from the Vietnam experience?

\*Factors relatively neglected by US Strategists due to experience with the American Way of War.

- Is our intelligence system becoming too equipment and paper oriented to the detriment of HUMINT and objective analysis of enemy "intentions"? Why do we get surprised so often at the national and tactical levels?
- Why, at the end of each war this century, does our "tail" get cut severely in order to fill the "teeth"? What were the historical results at the beginning of each subsequent war? Do we start each war too light, logistically, and end up too heavy? What are the impediments in explaining such "facts of life and war" to the civilian "strategists" and what can/should be done about it?
- What is the net effect of large staffs (civilian and military) and the World War II-generated American military "work ethic" on paper work, today's/tomorrow's "flap", and on deep forward-thinking? Does it really matter and if so how? What can/should be done by the military, or should real strategic thinking be left to scientists, political appointees, academics, and "think tanks"?
- What are the strategic/technical/tactical "provinces" of elected and appointed USG leaders, the scientists, the industrialists, the systems analysts, and the uniformed military? Which provinces have clearly defined boundaries, and which are ill charted or uncharted? Is the military still a unique profession and, if so, how can it more effectively interface with its civilian counterparts and masters? (e.g., how can the JCS better plan, "sell", and overwatch military operations?) \* )
- Have the doctrines and concepts for future combined and joint operations been restudied and agreed? If not what are the obstacles and workable alternatives?

SOURCE: BDM Research and Analysis